

Between Liberty and Faith: Exploring the Dynamics of Childfree Choices in the Islamic Perspective of Malaysia

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki fenomena pilihan gaya hidup tanpa anak di Malaysia, khususnya dalam perpektif ajaran Islam sebagaimana ditafsirkan dalam "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin". Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan analisis kualitatif terhadap teks-teks keagamaan dan wawancara dengan lima individu Malaysia. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa keputusan untuk mengejar kehidupan tanpa anak, yang dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor seperti kebebasan individu, pertimbangan ekonomi, dan otonomi pribadi, berbeda dengan interpretasi ajaran Islam tentang keluarga dan prokreasi. Kitab suci Islam, terutama QS Al-Baqarah: 187 dan Al-Imran 14, menggarisbawahi pentingnya hubungan pernikahan tidak semata-mata untuk kepuasan fisik tetapi juga untuk tujuan menghasilkan keturunan yang saleh. Temuan-temuan ini menjelaskan perbedaan yang mencolok antara tren sosial kontemporer dan sudut pandang Islam tentang keluarga dan prokreasi di Malaysia. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap wacana akademis dengan menyajikan perspektif yang unik tentang bagaimana interpretasi Islam menyikapi pilihan gaya hidup kontemporer seperti hidup tanpa anak. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menjelaskan hubungan yang rumit antara dinamika sosial, ekonomi, dan agama dalam masyarakat Malaysia. Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan berharga yang dapat menginformasikan kebijakan dan praktik dalam kesehatan reproduksi, pendidikan, dan konseling keluarga.

Kata Kunci: Gaya Hidup Tanpa Anak; Interpretasi Islam; Malaysia; Pilihan Reproduksi; Dinamika Sosial

Abstract

This study investigates the childfree lifestyle choice phenomenon in Malaysia, particularly within the framework of Islamic teachings as interpreted in "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin". Employing a qualitative approach, this research integrates qualitative analysis of religious texts and interviews with five Malaysian individuals. The study reveals that the decision to pursue a childfree life, influenced by factors such as individual freedom, economic considerations, and personal autonomy, contrasts with the interpretations of Islamic teachings on family and procreation. Key Islamic scriptures, notably QS Al-Baqarah: 187 and Al-Imran 14, underscore the significance of marital relations not solely for physical gratification but also for the purpose of producing righteous progeny. These findings illuminate a marked divergence between contemporary social trends and the traditional Islamic viewpoints on family and procreation in Malaysia. The study makes a significant contribution to academic discourse by presenting a unique perspective on how traditional Islamic interpretations shape attitudes toward contemporary lifestyle choices like childfree living. Additionally, it elucidates the intricate interplay of social, economic, and religious dynamics within Malaysian society. This research offers valuable insights that could inform policies and practices in reproductive health, education, and family counseling.

Keywords: *Childfree Lifestyle; Islamic Interpretations; Malaysia; Reproductive Choices; Social Dynamics*

Introduction

The phenomenon of childfree, the deliberate decision not to have children,¹ has become a significant topic of social and cultural debate worldwide.² In many countries, including Malaysia, the prevalence of this lifestyle choice continues to rise, driven by various factors such as shifting social values, career priorities, financial freedom, and environmental

¹ Christian Agrillo and Cristian Nelini, "Childfree by Choice: A Review," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 25, no. 3 (October 2008): 347–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873630802476292>.

² Rebecca Harrington, "Childfree by Choice," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (January 2019): 22–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2019.1559515>; Helen Peterson and Kristina Engwall, "Silent Bodies: Childfree Women's Gendered and Embodied Experiences," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 20, no. 4 (November 2013): 376–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506812471338>; Erik Nakkerud, "Ideological Dilemmas Actualised by the Idea of Living Environmentally Childfree," *Human Arenas* 6, no. 4 (December 2023): 886–910, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-021-00255-6>; Sabrina Helm, Joya A. Kemper, and Samantha K. White, "No Future, No Kids—No Kids, No Future?," *Population and Environment* 43, no. 1 (September 2021): 108–29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-021-00379-5>; Shelly Volsche, Shelby Schmidt, and D. Nicole Farris, "From Voluntarily Childless to Childfree: Sociohistoric Perspectives on a Contemporary Trend," in *International Handbooks of Population*, 2020, 285–94, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35079-6_19.

concerns.³ Within the Islamic world, this phenomenon faces unique challenges as it intersects with deeply held religious values and traditions regarding the role of family and progeny. In Malaysia, where Islam holds a significant role in the social and cultural fabric, the choice to be childfree raises important questions about the balance between personal freedom, social responsibility, and religious teachings. The increasing trend has drawn serious attention to how the childfree phenomenon is interpreted in the context of Islamic teachings, and more specifically, how it is viewed in the context of exegesis and the perspectives of scholars, including those in Malaysia.

While the phenomenon of childfree has not been extensively researched by scholars, some studies have provided valuable insights into the reasons why people choose not to have children. Research by Blackstone and Stewart,⁴ Höglund dan Hildingsson,⁵ serta Watling Neal dan Neal⁶ has explored various motivations behind this decision. Commonly cited primary reasons revolve around the desire for personal freedom, including freedom from the responsibilities of parenting, opportunities for self-development, and a lack of willingness or suitability for the role of a parent. Earlier research on the childfree has delved into various aspects of this phenomenon, ranging from the psychological impact and well-being of individuals who choose not to have children, as evidenced in studies highlighting the subjective well-being and self-differentiation of childfree women,⁷ to the social and cultural implications of this decision. For example, research has explored how the digital age and Islamic legal perspectives influence societal perceptions and acceptance of the childfree.⁸ Additionally, there is research linking the

³ Inquirer, "Malaysia's Shrinking Families," Inquirer, 2019; New Straits Times, "Many Couples Choose Not to Have Children," New Straits Times, 2019.

⁴ "Choosing to Be Childfree: Research on the Decision Not to Parent," *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 9 (September 2012): 718–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2012.00496.x>.

⁵ "Why and When Choosing Child-Free Life in Sweden? Reasons, Influencing Factors and Personal and Societal Factors: Individual Interviews during 2020–2021," *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare* 35 (March 2023): 100809, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2022.100809>.

⁶ "Prevalence, Age of Decision, and Interpersonal Warmth Judgements of Childfree Adults: Replication and Extensions," ed. Janna Metzler, *PLOS ONE* 18, no. 4 (April 2023): e0283301, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283301>.

⁷ Vered Shenaar-Golan and Omer Lans, "Measuring Differentiation of Self to Evaluate Subjective Well-Being in Women Who Are Childfree by Choice," *The Family Journal* 31, no. 2 (April 2023): 278–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807221123552>.

⁸ Erfaniah Zuhriah et al., "Childfree, the Digital Era, and Islamic Law: Views of Nahdlatul

childfree choice to environmental concerns and activism, examining childfree as a response to climate change and as a form of environmental activism.⁹ Studies have also examined the demographics and characteristics of the childfree population, including the prevalence and stereotypes faced by childfree individuals, as well as the application of the childfree concept in non-Western contexts.¹⁰

The main issue to be addressed in this research is how the childfree phenomenon, the deliberate decision of individuals or couples not to have children, can be explained in the context of the teachings of the Quran. This study will specifically focus on the interpretation of the Quran as elaborated in the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," a recognized tafsir work in Malaysia. Through this approach, the research aims to understand the Islamic perspective on the concept of childfree, exploring how this tafsir interprets relevant verses and connects them to this phenomenon. This research question is crucial given the significant role held by family and progeny in Islam and how this phenomenon is viewed in the broader social and cultural context, especially in Muslim-majority countries like Malaysia. This investigation seeks to provide fresh insights into the religious interpretation related to the childfree lifestyle choice and its potential contribution to a broader discussion on the role and significance of family in Islam.

The objective of this research is to investigate and comprehend how the childfree phenomenon is interpreted in the context of the teachings of the Quran, with a specific focus on the study of the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin." This research intends to explore the Islamic perspectives on childfree, considering theological, social, and cultural aspects. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the childfree lifestyle choice in the context of Islamic religion, which plays a pivotal role in

Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and Gender Activists in Malang, Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (2023): 1606–26.

⁹ Erik Nakkerud, "Choosing to Live Environmentally Childfree: Private-Sphere Environmentalism, Environmental Activism, or Both?," *Current Psychology*, March 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04295-9>; Nakkerud, "Ideological Dilemmas Actualised by the Idea of Living Environmentally Childfree."

¹⁰ Merve Erkaya and Anil Ozge Ustunel, "A Qualitative Study on the Marital Experiences of Childfree Couples in Turkey," *International Journal of Systemic Therapy*, July 2023, 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2692398X.2023.2240680>; Watling Neal and Neal, "Prevalence, Age of Decision, and Interpersonal Warmth Judgements of Childfree Adults: Replication and Extensions."

many societies. This is important as it will provide new insights for the academic community, religious leaders, and the broader society on how lifestyle choices like childfree can be viewed from a religious perspective, especially in Islam, which often emphasizes the importance of family and progeny.

In this study, a qualitative research methodology approach is employed to understand the childfree phenomenon in the context of the teachings of the Quran. This method involves a comprehensive analysis of the texts of the Quran and their interpretations in the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," both of which are the primary focus of the study. The research material includes Quranic verses directly or indirectly related to the concept of childfree and their interpretations in the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin." Furthermore, this research also entails an extensive literature review, including journals, articles, and books relevant to the theme of childfree, Quranic interpretation, and the socio-cultural context in Malaysia. The data collection and analysis processes aim to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Islamic views and interpretations of childfree, particularly through the lens of the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin" and its application in the Malaysian context. This research is enriched with qualitative data obtained from interviews with five Malaysian individuals, providing additional insights into personal perceptions and experiences related to childfree. This approach allows the research to uncover various aspects and nuances of the childfree phenomenon, integrating theological, social, and cultural perspectives into its analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. Fenomena Childfree di Malaysia

Respondent	Childfree Reasons
Ai (31)	Freedom from parental responsibilities
Yh (25)	Economic factors, cost of living, and financial aspects
Tr (29)	Focus on oneself and mental health
Ry (24)	Spirit of individualism and freedom
Yo (24)	Mental health challenges and concerns about harm to children

The research results indicate that the decision to adopt a childfree lifestyle in Malaysia is influenced by various complex factors, involving social, cultural, and religious dynamics. The societal perception of cultural norms

plays a key role in shaping individual choices regarding this decision. Some respondents, like Ai (31 years old), present a unique perspective with humor, depicting the freedom they enjoy from taking care of other people's children without the full responsibilities of parenthood.

Yh (25 years old) highlights economic factors as one of the primary reasons for choosing a childfree lifestyle. Concerns about the cost of living and the financial responsibilities associated with raising children are central points in her considerations. This reflects the complexity of social dynamics influencing childfree decisions in Malaysia, where social constructs and societal issues become crucial factors affecting individuals' perceptions of parental roles. Awareness of significant financial implications also highlights that the decision not to have children often involves deep considerations of economic stability and meeting living needs.

Tr (29 years old), a newlywed, underscores the importance of self-focus as a determining factor in her decision. With a background of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and commitment issues, Tracy prioritizes mental health as her primary concern in life's journey. The continuity of this consideration is evident in her expressed concerns about inheriting complex genetic factors. Thus, Tracy creates a narrative emphasizing the need for a balance between self-focus and responsibility for genetic factors that might influence her descendants.

Ry (24 years old) voices a strong view on personal freedom as her primary focus. Emphasizing her desire for independent living, Raya creates a narrative that reflects a strong sense of individualism in pursuing a childfree lifestyle. A concrete example of this perspective is her determination to maintain a focus on self-development without being encumbered by parental responsibilities. Therefore, Raya's viewpoint not only becomes a depiction of her personal preferences but also mirrors the spirit of freedom as the primary driving force behind her childfree decision.

Yo (24 years old) from Perak chose to live a childfree life due to challenges related to mental health issues. Her decision emerged because Yo found it difficult to handle the cries of a baby and had concerns about the potential for causing harm to the baby. Although this decision was based on acknowledging her limitations in caring for a child, full support and understanding from her immediate environment have not yet been fully

realized. These challenges create complex dynamics around Yo's childfree life decision, indicating a gap between personal choices and societal perceptions.

2. The Childfree Phenomenon in the Interpretation of "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin"

Within this commentary book, the author has identified several verses related to the concept of childfree or the choice not to have offspring within marriage. Some of the verses found by the author are as follows:

a. QS Al- Baqarah: 187

أَجَلٌ لَّكُمْ لَيْلَةٌ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ ۚ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ ۗ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ ۚ فَالْآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۗ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ۗ ثُمَّ أَتَمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ ۗ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ ۗ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرُبُوهَا ۗ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for sexual relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset. But do not have relations with them while you are staying in the mosques. These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His verses to the people that they might become righteous.

In the context of the interpretation of this verse, as explained by the late Dato Yusuf Zakya in this book, the meaning of the part of the verse that mentions, "هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ" (they are clothing for you), is elaborated upon. According to Dato Yusuf, this verse conveys the idea that the marital relationship should be very intimate, close, and affectionate. There is a natural and secret desire within both spouses to have a close physical relationship, which should not be separated and is always desired by one another. This desire is beautifully described by Allah, indicating a high and ideal level of intimacy in the relationship.

Dato Yusuf emphasizes that every civilized individual needs "clothing" in their life because clothing provides comfort, protection, pleasure, as well

as self-esteem. Similarly, in the husband-wife relationship, it is expected that they provide each other with comfort, protection, understanding, support, tranquility, as well as satisfaction both physically and emotionally. This creates a harmonious relationship, strengthens self-esteem, and enhances happiness in marriage. Thus, the concept suggested by Allah is a concept of unity in diversity, where husband and wife become one entity within marriage.¹¹

The natural inclination for married couples is to learn to respect and understand each other's roles. It's not just about providing for each other's material needs but also fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs. Moreover, it's emphasized in this surah that marital relations are not merely a physical act but have a purpose. In the book "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," it is stated in the interpretation of the verse (فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ) that you are allowed to do what was previously forbidden because it has been made lawful. However, it should be done with good intentions, specifically with the intention of having offspring through the act of sexual relations. This indicates that the relationship is not merely about satisfying desires but should aim at achieving the highest purpose of marriage, which is to procreate and continue the lineage. It demonstrates that it's not just about fulfilling physical desires but also aligning them with the divine purpose (the command of Allah) and connecting both aspects

It is important to note that in the context of the interpretation of this verse, there is a strong emphasis on the purpose of marriage, which is to continue the lineage or procreate. This signifies that, in the religious perspective, marriage is not merely a physical act but also possesses a deeper spiritual dimension. This verse underscores the significance of having good intentions in the marital relationship, specifically with the noble aim of bearing offspring who will become the successors of generations. In the view of Islam, marriage constitutes a sacred bond with a higher purpose than merely satisfying individual desires. This leads us to the understanding that rejecting the idea of having children within marriage may be considered incompatible with the religious principles that delineate a loftier purpose for marriage itself.

¹¹ Abdul Hayie Sukor, *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication, 2010), 256.

b. QS Al-Imran 14

رُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ۗ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَآبِ

Made attractive to people is the love of desires, including women, children, heaps of gold and silver, fine branded horses, cattle, and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return (i.e., Paradise).

In Surah Al-Imran, verse 14, an explanation is provided regarding what is considered attractive to human beings. This verse mentions several elements, including women, children, wealth in the form of gold and silver, chosen horses, livestock, and farmland, as objects of human desire. According to A. H. Sukor,¹² the mention of women at the beginning of this verse refers to the psychological view that behind the success of every man is a woman who provides support. This concept emphasizes the importance of women, especially in the context of family and lineage. However, in the context of the verse, it signifies that these elements are worldly provisions that should be enjoyed appropriately and not excessively, as a means to achieve higher purposes in life, namely goodness in the sight of Allah.

In the context of family life, the desire to have children is often considered a fundamental aspect. According to the perspective of fitrah, both men and women tend to have a deep-seated desire to have offspring. This is partly based on the understanding that children are a manifestation of the love between husband and wife. Psychologically and sociologically, love for children and the desire to have them can be seen as a natural human trait. Children are often viewed as a source of affection, hope, and the continuation of a parent's legacy and deeds after their passing. This perspective also finds support in Islamic teachings, where the prophets, including Prophet Ibrahim (AS), are described in the Quran as supplicating to Allah SWT to be granted righteous offspring, as exemplified in Surah As-Saffat verse 100: "O my Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous".¹³ This emphasizes that in Islam, having offspring is not only seen as the continuation of generations but also as a means to preserve and continue religious practices and values. Thus, the

¹² *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin Juzuz 3 Dan 4* (Jakim, 2011), 304.

¹³ Sukor, *Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin*.

desire to have righteous children can be interpreted as part of the sunnatullah (natural order) in life.

In the religious context, particularly in Islam, the concept of having children and continuing the lineage plays a crucial role. This is based on the understanding that children not only represent the continuation of the lineage but also play an essential role in maintaining and continuing religious practices after their parents' passing. This concept is rooted in Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of offspring as one of the primary purposes of marriage. For example, the desire of the prophets, including Prophet Ibrahim (AS), to be granted righteous offspring, as described in the Quran, illustrates the significant value placed on having righteous children. This indicates that in Islam, supplicating for righteous offspring is considered a natural part of life and religious practice.

From this perspective, the practice of 'childfree' by choice—the decision not to have children—can be interpreted as conflicting with the principles taught in Islam. Quranic verses that refer to the importance of offspring in the context of family and society indicate that having and raising children is considered an integral part of a life based on Islamic teachings. In this context, the rejection of the concept of offspring, whether voluntarily or as part of a larger movement, can be seen as inconsistent with the values and practices recommended in Islam. Therefore, Islam's view of the importance of offspring and their role in the continuation of worship and religious traditions suggests that the 'childfree' practice is not in line with these religious teachings.

3. Childfree Lifestyle in Malaysia: Factors, Conflicts with Islamic Principles, and Societal Implications

In the context of Malaysia, the phenomenon of childfree living reflects the diversity of factors influencing individuals' choices in this lifestyle, primarily driven by social, economic, and mental health dynamics. Respondents such as Ai (31 years old) prioritize freedom from parental responsibilities, while Yh (25 years old) focuses on economic factors such as the cost of living and financial considerations. Tr (29 years old), with a background of ADHD and commitment issues, emphasizes mental health as their primary reason. Ry (24 years old) highlights individualism and freedom as determining factors, and Yo (24 years old) has made the childfree decision due to mental health challenges and potential concerns in caring for children. The results of this research reveal that the decision to live childfree in Malaysia is not only the

result of personal choices but also closely related to broader social issues, reflecting the complexity of social and cultural dynamics influencing this lifestyle choice.

Research on the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia indicates a conflict between this lifestyle choice and Islamic principles. Based on "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," verses like QS Al-Baqarah: 187 in Islam emphasize the importance of noble intentions in marriage, including the goal of bearing offspring as the successors of generations. This perspective views marriage as a sacred bond with a purpose beyond individual satisfaction but for the formation of a family and the continuation of generations. Furthermore, Al-Imran 14 underscores the importance of offspring in family life, where children are regarded as manifestations of love, affection, hope, and the continuation of parents' deeds. Support for having righteous offspring, as expressed by the prophets in the Quran, reaffirms the view that in Islam, offspring is an essential part of preserving and continuing worship practices and religious values. Therefore, the decision not to have children, as chosen by some individuals in Malaysia, can be interpreted as a deviation from Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of offspring in the context of marriage and family life.

The results of this study indicate that the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia, influenced by various factors such as individual preferences, economic conditions, and mental health, raises important questions about the interaction between personal lifestyle choices and the dominant cultural and religious values in society. Rejection of the childfree practice based on Islamic principles, as described in the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," highlights the tension between individual choices and societal or religious expectations. The implications of these findings reflect the complex dynamics within Malaysian society, where lifestyle choices like childfree may be seen as deviating from prevailing social and religious norms. These findings also underscore the significant role of religion in shaping family and reproductive norms, as elucidated by Hamid¹⁴ in their research on the influence of religion on reproductive behavior. Therefore, the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia is not merely a matter of personal choice but also raises broader questions

¹⁴ "Influence of Religion on Healthcare Professionals' Beliefs toward Teenage Sexual Practices in Malaysia," *Makara Journal of Health Research* 24, no. 1 (2020): 27–34, <https://doi.org/10.7454/msk.v24i1.1175>.

about how social and religious norms influence individual decisions in a larger context.

The findings of this study, which explore the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia and its conflict with Islamic principles, can be compared to similar research in other contexts. Many other studies highlight that the decision to remain childfree is often influenced by economic and personal factors. From an economic perspective, Jafar¹⁵ found that factors such as financial stability and the cost of raising children are the primary reasons for couples to choose the childfree lifestyle, with 42% of respondents in one study citing economics as the most significant influence on their decision. Additionally, personal factors like the desire for freedom, independence, and the ability to manage one's own time also contribute to the decision not to have children.¹⁶ Individuals who choose the childfree lifestyle value their ability to make important and independent life choices.¹⁷

In a social context, the childfree trend can impact community social life. Some informants expressed concerns about the impact of the childfree phenomenon on the social life of the Muslim community.¹⁸ However, on the other hand, some studies noted that younger generations tend to be more open to individuals who choose the childfree lifestyle.¹⁹ Overall, the decision to be childfree is influenced by a combination of economic and personal factors and has significant social implications.

Similar research in Western countries has shown that the decision to be childfree is more influenced by personal and professional considerations, with social and economic aspects also playing a significant role. Studies conducted by Settle and Brumley,²⁰ for example, indicate that in many

¹⁵ "The Childfree Phenomenon Based on Islamic Law and Its Respond on Muslim Society," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2023): 389–406, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2-7865>.

¹⁶ Höglund and Hildingsson, "Why and When Choosing Child-Free Life in Sweden? Reasons, Influencing Factors and Personal and Societal Factors: Individual Interviews during 2020–2021."

¹⁷ Höglund and Hildingsson.

¹⁸ Jafar et al., "The Childfree Phenomenon Based on Islamic Law and Its Respond on Muslim Society."

¹⁹ Höglund and Hildingsson, "Why and When Choosing Child-Free Life in Sweden? Reasons, Influencing Factors and Personal and Societal Factors: Individual Interviews during 2020–2021."

²⁰ "It's the Choices You Make That Get You There': Decision-Making Pathways of Childfree Women," *Michigan Family Review* 18, no. 1 (December 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/>

Western countries, the decision to be childfree is often more related to an individual's desire to pursue a career or personal hobbies or concerns about the environmental impact of population growth. Economic factors such as the cost of living and financial stability are still important, but the desire for personal freedom and autonomy often takes a more dominant position in the decision-making process.²¹ Thus, the findings of this study highlight unique cultural and religious differences in the Malaysian context, where factors such as religious norms and family responsibilities have a greater influence than in Western societies. In Malaysia, considerations related to religious values and family expectations often play a more determining role in decisions regarding having children, in contrast to the trends observed in the West, where personal and professional reasons more frequently become the primary factors in choosing the childfree lifestyle.

This background underlies the views expressed in the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin," which rejects the practice of childfree. This interpretation, delving into the principles of Islam, emphasizes family and reproductive values as essential aspects of religious life. In the context of Malaysia, where Islam plays a significant role in social and cultural life, these religious norms become more dominant in influencing individual attitudes and decisions. This interpretation interprets the verses of the Qur'an in a way that emphasizes the importance of procreation in marriage as an expression of family responsibility and commitment to religious values. This is different from the more common view in Western countries, where personal and professional considerations more often dominate the decision not to have children. Therefore, the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin" rejects the childfree trend by referring to the fundamental religious values that emphasize the role of procreation in marriage, reflecting significant differences in cultural and religious influence between Malaysian society and the West.

The implications of the research findings that show the rejection of the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin" towards the childfree practice in Malaysia provide valuable insights into the continuing role of religious values as guidance in the contemporary world. Despite global trends leaning towards individualism and personal choice, as seen in the acceptance of the childfree lifestyle, this rejection indicates that religious principles still have a strong

10.3998/mfr.4919087.0018.102.

²¹ Settle and Brumley.

influence, especially in a society that highly values its religious teachings and traditions. As explained by Pearce,²² religion often serves as an anchor that provides stability and direction amidst rapid social change. In this case, the "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin" illustrates how the teachings of Islam can be seen as a foundational pillar offering moral and ethical guidance in addressing modern dilemmas. This attachment to traditional values suggests that, despite shifts in social norms and lifestyle choices, religious values remain relevant and necessary to provide perspectives and guidance in an ever-changing world.

This research highlights the strong influence of religious and cultural values in Malaysian society. Islam, in this context, is not only a spiritual belief system but also serves as a deep-rooted social and moral framework. Hossain²³ in his study emphasizes the significant role of tradition and religious values in child-rearing in multi-ethnic Malaysia. In contemporary Malaysian families, family values and religious beliefs, including traditional Islamic principles, Confucian teachings, and Hindu wisdom, continue to form the primary foundation for successful and moral child-rearing. These factors, including a commitment to tradition and family responsibilities, play a crucial role in influencing attitudes towards phenomena such as childfree. Therefore, the research findings indicate adherence to religious doctrine and the enduring influence of values and social norms deeply rooted in Malaysian society.

Considering the research findings that highlight the rejection of the childfree practice in the context of Malaysia and the significant role of religion in family life, the actions to be taken involve an inclusive approach and dialogue between religious values and the needs of contemporary society. Firstly, there is a need to raise awareness and understanding of how religious values can be synchronized with the challenges and social realities of modern times, especially in the context of family and reproductive decisions. This can be achieved through educational programs that integrate religious understanding with awareness of diverse lifestyle choices. Secondly, religious

²² *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/97801997-53895.001.0001>.

²³ "Parental Beliefs and Fathers' and Mothers' Roles in Malaysian Families," in *Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science*, ed. Helaine Selin (London: Springer, 2014), 77–90, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7503-9_7.

institutions and community leaders need to engage in open dialogues with community members to discuss how religious principles can be adapted or interpreted in the context of modern life without compromising their core values. Finally, further research that explores the relationship between religion, lifestyle choices, and family dynamics in Malaysia would greatly assist in formulating more responsive and inclusive policies and practices. This approach will enable Malaysian society to strike a balance between preserving tradition and adapting to changing times, ensuring that religious values remain relevant and beneficial in guiding family life in the modern era.

Conclusion

The main conclusion of this research highlights that the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia, influenced by factors such as individual freedom, economic conditions, and individualism, is in contradiction with the interpretation of the teachings of the Quran as per "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin." In the context of Islam, as explained in this tafsir, having offspring and continuing the generation are considered primary objectives and crucial elements in marriage. Verses such as QS Al-Baqarah: 187 and Al-Imran 14 in the tafsir emphasize the importance of the husband-wife relationship, which aims not only to satisfy desires but also to produce righteous offspring. These findings underscore the incongruity between the values and practices advocated in Islam and the concept of childfree. It highlights the significance of the role of offspring in the context of family life and religion, especially in Malaysia, where Islam holds significant influence. Thus, the childfree phenomenon can be seen as a deviation from the principles of religion in the context of Muslim society.

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in the in-depth exploration of the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia within the context of the interpretation of Islamic teachings, particularly through the study of "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin." This research offers a unique perspective by combining contemporary social analysis and religious interpretation, highlighting how religious and cultural norms interact and conflict with modern social trends. Its scholarly contribution primarily lies in providing new insights into how the Islamic perspective, as interpreted in traditional tafsir, influences and shapes attitudes toward lifestyle choices such as childfree. This research also fills a knowledge gap by providing insights into the complex social, economic, and religious dynamics in Malaysian society, which can influence policies and

practices in the fields of reproductive health, education, and family counseling. Furthermore, this research contributes to academic discussions about the interaction between religion, culture, and reproductive decisions in ethnically and religiously diverse societies, offering valuable insights for similar studies in other contexts.

One of the main limitations of this research is its limited focus on the interpretation of Islamic teachings in the context of "Tafsir Pedoman Muttaqin" related to the childfree phenomenon in Malaysia, which may not fully reflect the diversity of views in the broader Muslim community. This research also relies on the analysis of religious texts and respondent surveys, which may not fully capture the complexity of individual experiences and motivations behind the childfree lifestyle choice. For future research, it is recommended to involve broader qualitative studies, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of personal perceptions and individual experiences related to childfree. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore how other interpretations of religion or Islamic denominations differ in their views on this phenomenon in Malaysian society. Research comparing attitudes toward childfree among various religious groups in Malaysia can also provide insights into how overall religious and cultural factors influence family and reproductive decisions. This approach can assist in formulating more inclusive and culturally sensitive policies and programs.

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