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The Childfree Phenomenon in Marriage among Millennials and Generation Z: A Study of Quraish Shihab's Interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*

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ABSTRACT

Quraish Shihab expressed concern about the childfree phenomenon, arguing that it contradicts Islamic teachings, which encourage having children. He believes that children are a blessing from God, and refusing to have children should not be based solely on individualistic choices but should also consider Islamic values and the well-being of the community. This research uses descriptive-analysis, which is to receive detailed information by explaining about childfree and marriage, while this research is qualitative, using the use of documentation using library research techniques, namely by using data sourced from media information, books, and previous research that is relevant to the discussion. While in the study of the Qur'an and Tafsir the author uses the Conceptual Thematic Interpretation method, which is a way of interpreting the Qur'an by taking a certain theme and then collecting verses related to the theme, so as to form a complete idea. In this paper the author reveals the verses of the Qur'an that indicate the prohibition of childfree in Tafsir Al-Misbah, the arguments or reasons for Quraish Shihab to reject childfree in Tafsir Al-Misbah, and the background of Quraish Shihab to reject childfree in marriage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently dominated by the Millennial and Gen Z generations. Gen Z is known as the generation born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, while Millennials were born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. Studies show that many Gen Z and Millennials are choosing not to have children, for several reasons. First, Gen Z and Millennials prefer to focus on their careers and personal freedom. Second, the high cost of living is one of the main reasons for Gen Z and Millennials to be childfree. Third, many feel that the current world is not ideal for children. Fourth, mental health is a top priority compared to having a large family.

Childfree advocates argue that most marriages in Indonesia are a form of subtle slavery for women, from bedroom duties to daily care. Women are viewed as "objects or child-making machines" and subordinate to men, not as life partners. They also see many Indonesian parents treating children as property, allowing them to treat them however they please: cursing when impatient, hitting when they make mistakes, and much more. Men raised in patriarchal cultures typically see their success as being achieved through having children, and preferably boys. Childfree advocates challenge this belief and don't see having children as something that can be associated with the word "success" (Tunggono, 2021).

In a number of Western countries, the phenomenon of women choosing not to have children has become commonplace. This is not unusual, as the majority of Western citizens uphold the principle of reproductive sovereignty, which places the decision to have or not have children solely in the hands of the woman herself, not her husband, family, state, religion, or anyone else. This view is based on the belief that women alone have full control over their bodies, as echoed by the feminist group "my body, my choice" (Al Farisi, 2021).

Islam highly protects the honor and dignity of women, so there are many rules in Islam related to women that are meant to uphold their glory. In the Qur'an, the privileges of a woman are also explained. The position of women in Islam is as a companion or partner of a man (Q.S. Al-Hujrat (49): 13); Women are trusted by Allah to be able to conceive, give birth and breastfeed (Q.S. Al-Ahqaf (46): 15); Women as mothers have a higher position than a father (H.R. Bukhari); Women have the right to receive a dowry when married to a man (Q.S. An-Nisa (4): 4); Women's honor is protected in Islam (Q.S. Al-Ahzab (33): 59); And a woman can enter heaven through any door (H.R. Ahmad and Ibn Hibban in Sahih al-Jami').

The privileges women have mentioned above should not be completely eroded by irresponsible ideas, one of which is the idea of childfree. This idea, strongly supported by feminist theories, has at least influenced the lives of modern women today, especially the Millennial and Gen Z generations. While our lives may indeed have problems, adopting foreign ideas that conflict with cultural and religious values will only worsen the situation. Finding the best solutions for life based on one's own religious values and traditions is a more effective solution.

Prof. Quraisy Shihab, an Indonesian Quranic commentator, was once asked about his opinion on the childfree phenomenon. As quoted by satu.com during the 2023 Islamic Festival at the Redtop Hotel in Jakarta, he stated: "I'm afraid if everyone thinks like that (childfree), humans will no longer exist on the face of the earth." In life, we are taught to be optimistic, but an optimism accompanied by caution. From here, religion forbids efforts to stop having children. He further emphasized that in religion, children are a blessing. "When we grow old, we need children." In Islam, he said, they also teach about control so that the number of children can be planned, not limited.

Planning the number of children in Islam is very permissible, with the aim of preparing a superior Islamic generation, this has been agreed upon by the consensus of scholars. Based on the word of Allah SWT in Q.S An-Nisa (4): 9;

وَلْيَخْشَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَوْ تَرَكُوا۟ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعَٰفًا خَافُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ فَلْيَتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَلْيَقُولُوا۟ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

Meaning: “And let those who leave behind them weak children, for whom they fear (for their welfare), fear Allah. Therefore let them fear Allah and speak the truth.”

So based on the background above, the author conducted this research with the title “The Childfree Phenomenon in Marriage in The Millennial and Gen Z Era (A Study of Quraish Shihab's Interpretation in Tafsir Al-Misbah).”It is hoped that this research can provide enlightenment, especially to Millennial and Gen Z women regarding the issue of childfree.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an that indicate the prohibition of childfree

Among the many verses of the Qur'an, there are no verses that explicitly mention childfree, nor are there any verses that explain the indication of the permissibility of childfree or the obligation to have children. What the author found was a recommendation to have children. However, discussions of the term child in the Qur'an related to Childfree have been widely written by several previous researchers. The author's focus in this study is to discuss childfree based on its motives from the perspective of Quraish Shihab's perfective interpretation, where the childfree phenomenon is currently a choice for married women, especially for the Millennial Generation and Gen Z. What the author means by the verses of the Qur'an that indicate the prohibition of childfree are verses that are related to the motives of childfree itself. It could be that these verses implicitly allow women to be childfree, because choosing childfree is not a rejection of having children as a whole, but rather a certain underlying motive. There are three motives that the author will discuss, the verses of the Qur'an are as follows:

1. The verse "Children are a test"

Most women who choose to be childfree consider children a burden. However, the Quran states that children are a test, not a burden. Burden and test do not have the same meaning, although they are often

used in similar contexts, namely facing difficulties or challenges. A burden refers to something heavy or a burden that must be borne, while a test is something used to test a person's abilities, fortitude, or faith, and can be a trial or a blessing (Pusat Bahasa, 2023). In Islam itself, life's trials are considered one of Allah SWT's ways of testing human faith and patience. Children can be a test for various reasons, including the need to educate them well, the challenges of parenting, and their potential influence on their parents' faith. The Qur'anic evidence that children are a test is found in Surah Al-Anfal (8) verse 28 and Surah At-Taghabun (64) verse 15.

وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ فِتۡنَةٞ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ

Meaning: "And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial and that surely with Allah is a great reward" (QS. Al-Anfal/8: 28)

إِنَّمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ فِتۡنَةٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ

Meaning: "Indeed, your wealth and your children are a test from Allah - with Him is a great reward – (QS. At-Tagabun / 64: 15)

Historically, the two verses above are considered Madaniyah verses because they were revealed during the early days of the Hijrah. This can be seen from the asbabun nuzul of the verse. In Tafsir Al-Misbah, At-Tirmidhi narrated that according to Ibn 'Abbas, this verse was revealed (at-Thagabun: 15) in connection with the case of many residents of Mecca who wanted to migrate but were prevented by their wives and children. Another narration states that the verse was revealed in Medina in connection with the case of 'Auf Ibn Malik al-Ashja'iy whose wife and children always cried when he was about to go to war, while forbidding him from joining, fearing that they would be left behind by 'Auf. Meanwhile, the asbabun nuzul of QS. Al-Anfal: 28, this verse is related to the incident of Abu Lubabah who betrayed the Prophet's orders because of his compassion for his child. Quraish Shihab said that love of children and property is a motivation for someone to betray Allah and His Messenger.

According to Quraish Shihab, children are a test not only when parents are driven by love for them and they violate them, but also because of their position as a trust from Allah SWT. Allah tests humans through their children, to see whether they actively nurture, that is, educate and develop the child's potential to become the human being that Allah desires, namely to become a servant of Allah and a caliph in the world. Neglecting this task is a form of betrayal of Allah and the trust He has entrusted to humans. Likewise, wealth is not only a test when it causes humans to forget its social function, or to try to obtain it in a wrong way, but it is also a test of whether the wealth is maintained and developed so that the results are multiplied through halal and good efforts. This verse is one proof of Allah's mercy to humans. He is the One who shows human weaknesses, so that humans are aware of them so that in turn everyone is always alert and does not lose sight of their roots (Shihab, 2002b).

2. The verse about "Pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding are burdensome for women"

One reason women choose to be childfree is that they fear or are reluctant to face the process of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. These experiences can be physically and psychologically stressful for a woman. Pregnancy causes significant hormonal changes that can affect mood, energy, and various bodily functions. This can begin with physical symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, backache, swollen feet, and more. This can be a significant burden for pregnant women.

Childbirth, whether vaginal or cesarean, is a very difficult physical experience and requires recovery. Breast milk production and breastfeeding require a lot of energy and can cause breast pain. In addition, breastfeeding can also limit a woman's mobility and activities. Pregnancy and the birth of a baby change a woman's role from an individual to a mother. This change can cause anxiety, stress, and worry about her ability to care for her child. Some women experience depression after giving birth (postpartum depression), which can affect their mood, energy, and ability to care for themselves and their baby. What women experience during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding is described in the Qur'an, Surah Lukman (31), verse 14, namely:

وَوَصَّيۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ بِوَٰلِدَيۡهِ حَمَلَتۡهُ أُمُّهُۥ وَهۡنًا عَلَىٰ وَهۡنٖ وَفِصَٰلُهُۥ فِي عَامَيۡنِ أَنِ ٱشۡكُرۡ لِي وَلِوَٰلِدَيۡكَ إِلَيَّ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ

Meaning: "And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents. His mother bore him in a state of increasing weakness, and weaned him at the age of two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents. To Me is your return."

Regarding the verse above, in his Tafsir, Quraish Shihab explained that: "And We advise, that is, we advise very strongly to all people regarding their parents; Our message is because his mother has conceived him in a state of weakness upon weakness, namely weakness that is multiplied and from time to time increases. Then she gave birth to him with difficulty, then she nurtured and breastfed him at all times, even in the middle of the night, when other people are sound asleep. And so on until the time of weaning arrives and weaning him within two years from the day the child was born. This is if the parents want to complete the breastfeeding. Our advice is: Be grateful to Me! because I am the one who created you and provided all the means of your happiness, and be grateful to your two parents because they are the ones I made the mediator of your presence on this earth. You absolutely do this gratitude because only to Me - to no one else - you all return, O people, so that you may be accountable for that gratitude.

The verse above does not mention the father's services, but emphasizes the mother's services. This is because the mother has the potential to be ignored by the child due to the mother's weakness, unlike the father. On the other hand, the "father's role" in the context of child birth, is lighter than the mother's role. After conception, the entire process of child birth is borne alone by the mother. Not only until the time of birth, but continuing with breastfeeding, and even beyond that. Indeed, the father is also responsible for preparing and helping the mother so that the burden she bears is not too heavy, but this does not directly affect the child, unlike the role of the mother. However, his role is not as great as the mother's role in the child birth process, but his services are not ignored because the child is obliged to pray for his father, as he prays for his mother: Consider the prayer taught by the Qur'an: "My Lord, my Tuban! Have mercy on both of them, because they both raised me when I was small (QS. al-Isra" (17): 24) (Shihab, 2002b).

According to the author, based on the explanation above, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding are indeed burdensome for women, especially since each person's abilities and beliefs differ. Therefore, it is considered normal for some women to choose not to have children, aka childfree. However, in Islamic teachings, Allah SWT gives a very honorable and noble position to women, especially when they become mothers. Within a family, the role of a mother is crucial. Every human being born into this world is raised with extraordinary, infinite love and affection from a mother. There is a great reward for a mother who risks her life to bring her child into this world when she sincerely raises her child with patience and affection.

From the interpretation of the verse above, it can also be understood that the mother's status is more noble than the father's, this is in line with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW which indicates that the status of the mother is 3 times more noble than the father, the hadith reads as follows (Al-Bukhari, 1978):

حَدَثَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيْد حَدَثَنَا جَرِيْرٌ عَنْ عُمَارَةَ بْنِ الْقَعْقَاعِ بْنِ شُبْرُمَةَ عَنْ أَبِيْ زُرْعَةَ عَنْ أَبِيْ هُرَيْرَةَ بِحُسْنِ رَضِيَ اللهَ عَنْهُ قَالَ جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى رَسُوْلِ اللهِ صَلَ اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ سَلَّمَ فَقَالَ يَا رَسُلَ اللهِ مَنْ أَحَقُّ النَّاسِ صَحَابَتِيْ قَالَ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ قَالَ ثُمَّ أَبُوْكَ

(رواه بخاري)

Meaning: "Qutaibah bin Sa'id told us Jarir told us from 'Umarah bin Al Qa'qa' bin Shubrumah from Abu Zur'ah from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) said; "A man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said; "O Messenger of Allah, who is the person most deserving of my devotion?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked again; "Then who?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked again; "Then who?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked again; "Then who?" He replied: "Then your father." (HR. Bukhari).

3. Verses about "Women working or having a career"

Some women experience discrimination in the workplace due to pregnancy and breastfeeding, as well as difficulties in obtaining promotions or even losing their jobs. This is one reason women choose to remain

childfree after marriage. Although laws exist that protect the right to maternity leave, the availability and duration of leave, and guaranteed wages during leave, these protections present a challenge for women who wish to continue working. Furthermore, post-marriage, women often face a dual burden: career demands and responsibilities as primary caregivers. This is why they choose to delay or even forgo having children. In Islam, both men and women have equal rights in work, careers, and achievement. As Allah SWT says in QS. An-Nahl/16:97:

وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا مَنْ عَمِلَ صٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُۥ حَيَوٰةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ

Meaning: "Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while he is a believer, then verily We will give him a good life, and verily We will give them their reward according to the best of what they used to do."

Quraish Shihab argues that this verse emphasizes equality between men and women. The word "man" (who) at the beginning of the verse can actually refer to both sexes—male and female—but for the sake of emphasis, the verse explicitly mentions both men and women. This verse also demonstrates how women are also required to engage in beneficial activities, both for themselves and their families, as well as for society and their nation, and indeed humanity as a whole (Shihab, 2002b). Apart from that, in another verse, the scholars also allow women to work outside the home in order to help their husbands or families. As Allah SWT says in QS. Al-Qashash/28:23, namely:

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُمَا ۖ قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّىٰ يُصْدِرَ ٱلرِّعَآءُ ۖ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ ۖ فَسَقَىٰ لَهُمَا ثُمَّ تَوَلَّىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلظِّلِّ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّى لِمَآ أَنزَلْتَ إِلَىَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ۝ فَجَآءَتْهُ إِحْدَىٰهُمَا تَمْشِى عَلَى ٱسْتِحْيَآءٍ ۖ قَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِى يَدْعُوكَ لِيَجْزِيَكَ أَجْرَ مَا سَقَيْتَ لَنَا ۚ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُۥ وَقَصَّ عَلَيْهِ ٱلْقَصَصَ قَالَ لَا تَخَفْ ۖ نَجَوْتَ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ۝ قَالَتْ إِحْدَىٰهُمَا يَٰٓأَبَتِ ٱسْتَـْٔجِرْهُ ۖ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ ٱسْتَـْٔجَرْتَ ٱلْقَوِىُّ ٱلْأَمِينُ ۝ قَالَ إِنِّىٓ أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُنكِحَكَ إِحْدَى ٱبْنَتَىَّ هَٰتَيْنِ عَلَىٰٓ أَن تَأْجُرَنِى ثَمَٰنِىَ حِجَجٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَتْمَمْتَ عَشْرًا فَمِنْ عِندِكَ ۖ وَمَآ أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَشُقَّ عَلَيْكَ ۚ سَتَجِدُنِىٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ

Meaning: "When he reached the spring of Madyan, he found a group of people there watering (their livestock) and he found two women behind them driving (their livestock away from the spring). He (Moses) said, "What do you mean (by doing that)?" The two (women) replied, "We cannot water (our livestock) until the shepherds return (their livestock), and our father is an old man."

According to Quraish Shihab in his commentary, the scholars have used this verse as evidence that women are permitted to work and gather in the same arena as men, as long as they perform in a respectable manner. He further explained that, in principle, Islam does not prohibit women from working inside or outside their homes, independently or together, with the private sector or the government, day or night, as long as the work is carried out in a respectable manner, and as long as they can maintain the guidance of the religion and can avoid the negative impacts of the work they do on themselves and their environment. Working can be obligatory — for women — if the situation requires it, such as when a woman is about to give birth and there is no midwife to help her except her, or if she as a worker needs it, in order to maintain her survival or the lives of her children. Many women in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions worked, whether independently or not, to help their husbands who were unable to fulfill their obligations to provide for their families. At the time of the Prophet and his companions, he was known, among others, Umm Salim bint Malham as a bridal make-up artist, Qilat Ummi Bany Ammar as a trader, Zainab Ibn Jahsy who was known to be involved in tanning animal skins, ash-Syaffa"' who was assigned by the Caliph 'Umar Ibn Khaththab to handle the Medina market, and many others. In fact, especially for women who are wives, before working, they must obtain permission from their husband, and if without his permission, it is the husband's obligation. to provide for him can fail (Shihab, 2002b).

According to the author, from the explanation above, it can be understood that women may prioritize their careers if that is their choice, as long as they can create a balance between work and family responsibilities. Societal views and gender norms have changed, allowing women to pursue careers for self-actualization and family finances, as long as they do not neglect their primary role as a wife and mother if they are married. Many modern women can manage both roles as professionals and as family members, so they do not have to choose between the two. Career women can be role models for their children, teaching them that women are not inferior and can achieve success in various fields.

2.2. Quraish Shihab's Argument Against Childfree in Tafsir Al-Misbah

1. *Marriage protects offspring, the proof is in QS. An-Nahl/16:72*

وَٱللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَزۡوَٰجِكُم بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةٗ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِۚ أَفَبِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ يُؤۡمِنُونَ وَبِنِعۡمَتِ ٱللَّهِ هُمۡ يَكۡفُرُونَ

Meaning: "And Allah has made for you mates from among yourselves, and has made for you from your mates children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Why do they believe in falsehood and deny the favors of Allah?"

In his Tafsir Al-Misbah, Quraish Shihab explains this verse, "This verse underscores the blessings of marriage and the gift of offspring. It's no wonder, given that every human being possesses a sexual urge that becomes instinctive from childhood and, as adults, becomes a very difficult urge to contain. Therefore, humans long for a partner, and for this reason, partnering is a human nature, even the nature of all living creatures."

سُبۡحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ ٱلۡأَزۡوَٰجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنۢبِتُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَمِنۡ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ

Meaning: Glory be to Allah who created all things in pairs, from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know. (QS. Yāsīn/36 :36)

"Loneliness—and even more so, isolation—can truly haunt humans, because humans are fundamentally social creatures, creatures with a basic nature of "dependence and attachment." That is, they have a need to be attached to partners and groups, both small and large. Indeed, humans can sometimes feel happy in their solitude, but not forever. Humans have realized that deep and close relationships with others will help them gain strength and make them better able to face challenges, especially if the accompanying partner is of their own kind and of the same soul. It is for these reasons that humans marry, form families, even form communities and nations. God bestowed upon humans an immeasurable blessing by creating in every creature a tendency to pair up and be attached to groups, because, again, otherwise humans would be restless."

"On the other hand, humans have a tendency to live forever. Realizing that it is impossible for each individual to survive forever, the only way to maintain that survival is through offspring, which are an extension of personal life. Allah SWT has bestowed this tendency on all humans—especially women—so that the call of motherhood always calls out in their hearts. Experts say that women produce within themselves what are called estrogen, the love hormone, and progesterone, the mothering hormone. With the first hormone, she will continue to maintain her beauty, and with the second, she is motivated and willing to sacrifice her beauty for her children. If the relationship between father and child were severed, or if the marriage system were no longer recognized by society, or if human procreation ceased, the foundations of social life would undoubtedly become unstable, ultimately leading to human extinction" (Shihab, 2002b).

According to the author, based on Quraish Shihab's interpretation and arguments regarding the verse above, it shows that Quraish Shihab rejects childfree, because childfree is contrary to the goals of marriage as prescribed by Islam.

2. *Allah Guarantees Sustenance for Every Creature*

In Islam, children are not a burden, but rather a trust and a precious gift from Allah SWT. This view emphasizes that parents' responsibility to educate, care for, and provide for their children is an expression of gratitude to Allah SWT. Islam also reminds us not to view children as a burden, as Allah will provide for them and their parents, as stated in the Quran:

وَلَا تَقۡتُلُوٓاْ أَوۡلَٰدَكُمۡ خَشۡيَةَ إِمۡلَٰقٖۖ نَّحۡنُ نَرۡزُقُهُمۡ وَإِيَّاكُمۡۚ إِنَّ قَتۡلَهُمۡ كَانَ خِطۡـًٔا كَبِيرٗا

Meaning: "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. It is We who provide for them and for you. Indeed, killing them is a great sin." (QS. Al-Isrā / 17 : 31).

Quraish Shihab, in his book Tafsir Al-Misbah, explains that the reason for this verse's revelation is closely related to the behavior of the Jahiliyah (pre-Islamic) society, which commonly killed children, especially baby girls. This was based on the belief that girls were a burden and a disgrace to the family, and unable to contribute economically.

Quraish Shihab further explained that this verse reminds us that sustenance is the right of every creature. Allah SWT, as the Provider of Sustenance, will ensure the needs of all His servants. We need not worry or be anxious about future sustenance, for Allah SWT has already arranged everything. Our duty as humans is simply to strive and pray. Therefore, the act of killing a girl for reasons of poverty is a grave sin that is completely contrary to human values and religious teachings (Shihab, 2002b).

Surah Al-Isra, verse 31, explicitly forbids the act of killing children for fear of poverty, emphasizing that Allah guarantees sustenance for both children and parents. Therefore, childfree choices based on fear of poverty are wrong, as they emulate the beliefs of the Jahiliyah (pre-Islamic period) and ignore Allah's guarantee of sustenance. This verse confirms that killing children for fear of poverty is a grave sin, and childfree practices for this reason are considered murder in Islam.

3. Balance between Work and Family

Career and family balance in Islam (often called tawazun) is about managing both areas effectively without neglecting either, based on religious principles. The key is setting priorities, managing time wisely, fulfilling one's role professionally, balancing this world and the afterlife, and treating one's family well, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Ginanjar, 2017). This can be achieved through cooperation and mutual assistance between husband and wife.

Cooperation between husband and wife is crucial in Islam as it is the foundation of a peaceful and harmonious household. This cooperation encompasses sharing tasks, mutual support, open communication, and fulfilling religious obligations together, all of which aim to create a family that is obedient to God and full of love. According to Quraish Shihab, balance of roles and gender justice are the keys to achieving a peaceful family (Shihab, 2002a). In Islam, women are fundamentally equal to men in terms of human dignity. Women have the same right to life and to be respected as human beings, equal value in their deeds before God, and equal right to a happy life in this world and the hereafter. Even though the first woman was created from Adam. In the Word of God it is mentioned:

وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ وَيُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ
وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَٰكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ
وَرِضْوَٰنٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ

> It means : "The believing men and women are helpers of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and establish prayer, and give zakah, and obey Allah and His Messenger. They will be granted mercy from Allah. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might, Wise. (71) Allah has promised the believing men and believing women Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever, and goodly dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. Allah's pleasure is greater. That is the great triumph." (QS. At-Taubah 71-72)

In Tafsir Al-Misbah regarding the word of Allah above, two main things are emphasized: the values of social solidarity in verse 71, and the ultimate goal of a believer's struggle in verse 72. Verse 71 explains: First. Solidarity and Helping. This verse is the foundation of the importance of solidarity and mutual help among fellow believers, both men and women, in terms of difficulties and in terms of joint efforts. This mutual help is a form of care and affection taught by Islam. Second. Amar Makruf Nahi Munkar. That is, inviting to goodness and preventing evil is the duty and responsibility of every believer. This reflects concern for others to create a better and harmonious society. Third. The implementation of prayer and zakat worship and obedience to Allah and His Messenger are the characteristics of believers who will be blessed by Allah.

Meanwhile, the interpretation of verse 72 explains: First. The Purpose of a Believer's Life. This verse emphasizes that the highest goal of a believer is to attain the pleasure of Allah SWT. All activities and struggles must be directed towards that goal. Second. True good fortune. True good fortune is not merely wealth or worldly pleasures, but rather eternal good fortune, namely success in obtaining His paradise. Third. A worthwhile struggle. This verse provides a perfective that everything a believer does, both happy and sad, will be valuable in the sight of Allah if it is intended to achieve His pleasure.

From the interpretation above, there are two keys to achieving success in marriage, as mentioned by Quraish Shihab: First, there must be a shared goal, vision, and mission for marriage between husband and wife. Second,

there must be cooperation and mutual assistance between husband and wife, both in work and domestic matters. If these two things are realized, it is hoped that the decision to be childfree will be eliminated from married life.

4. Men and women have their own nature

In Islam, men and women are inherently equal in worship and humanity before Allah SWT. However, there are biological differences in nature and complementary roles. Both were created from the same soul and are judged based on faith, piety, and good deeds, not gender. Biological differences (such as the Adam's apple in men and the uterus in women) and differences in roles (men as leaders of families and women as primary educators of children) are part of the nature recognized in Islam. In the Quran, Allah reminds us that men and women should not envy each other's nature and roles. This is stated in Surah An-Nisa' 4:32:

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا۟ مَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا ٱكْتَسَبُوا۟ ۖ وَلِلنِّسَآءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا ٱكْتَسَبْنَ ۚ وَسْـَٔلُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مِن فَضْلِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمًا

It means : " Do not harbor any envy over what Allah has given some of you over others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. Ask Allah for some of His bounty. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing of all things."

In the Tafsir Al-Misbah, Asbābunnuzūl is mentioned regarding the verse above, namely At-Tirmidhi narrated through Mujahid that this verse was revealed regarding the words of the Prophet's wife, Umm Salamah, who said to the Messenger of Allah, "Indeed, men take up arms against the enemy, while women do not. We also as women only get half the share of men, ...". According to Quraish Shihab, This is a wishful thinking that is not in the right place so it is forbidden. But not all wishes are forbidden, because some can encourage the creation of new creations. This verse teaches us to live realistically. There are dreams and hopes that may be achievable, and there are also those that are clearly impossible or very far away, like a dwarf longing for the moon. This is what is forbidden. There are also dreams that give rise to passionate desires after seeing the special qualities of others accompanied by the hope that the special qualities will transfer to them and so on. This is also forbidden by Him.

The main points of Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the above verse: First. The prohibition of envy. This verse explicitly forbids humans from fantasizing or feeling jealous of the advantages possessed by others, both men and women. Second. Justice in endeavors. Each individual, both men and women, has rights and a share of what they have earned. This demonstrates equality in terms of work and rewards. Third. The context of inheritance distribution. The difference in inheritance distribution between men and women is not a form of injustice, because women are guaranteed to have their needs met by their husbands, including dowries and living expenses. Fourth. The importance of effort and prayer. In addition to striving according to one's abilities, this verse also emphasizes the importance of asking for blessings from Allah SWT. This directs each individual to focus on their efforts and not rely on desires that are not in line with their efforts. Fifth. The affirmation of roles. The different roles between men (for example, in jihad) and women (for example, in maintaining family honor) are part of the destiny and responsibility given by Allah. Sixth. The message of trust in Allah. This verse teaches us to believe that Allah knows best who has the right and what is best for each individual, so there is no need to be jealous of the blessings received by others.

The author also cites the opinion of another commentator regarding the above verse, Buya Hamka, in his interpretation of QS. An-Nisā/4 :32 says that, "The distribution that will be obtained due to effort is within the framework of self-duty and the distribution of work that has been determined by Allah SWT. Women are told to try, just as men are told to try, each in their respective fields. For example, if a man is successful in his business because he works hard outside the house, then this success will be complete if the woman or wife in the household that they have built together, also knows their obligations as a wife. The husband is responsible in outside the house, the wife is responsible at home. Men's work is rough and heavy, while women's work is delicate and complicated. Men's rough work cannot be carried out by women and women's fine work cannot be carried out by men his duties, then wants to be a woman (Amrullah, n.d.).

According to the author, when men and women understand their respective roles and natures, it can create equality that allows both to develop according to their talents, without having to compare each other, and can work together in the family and society. This will also create a sense of justice, reduce unequal burdens, and eliminate gender discrimination. So, the decision to be childfree in marriage should never have happened, because when a husband and wife are able to have children in the family, why should they choose to be childfree? Even though childfree also contradicts the principles of role balance and gender justice, especially after understanding the interpretation of the verse above.

2.3. Quraish Shihab's Background in Rejecting Childfree Marriage

1. Childfree Western Cultural Products

In the modern era, many people are fond of Western culture, especially the Millennial and Generation Z generations. Western social culture is increasingly circulating in Indonesia through various digital products, one of which is this childfree culture. Today, in the United States and other Western industrialized countries, fertility rates are low, a fact that means many individuals are childless. Childfree individuals have attracted popular media attention, including discussions in influential Time Magazine articles, documentaries and popular press books (Sandler & Witteman, 2013). In addition, there is growing research aimed at capturing individual characteristics and potential stigmatization of childfree.

This childfree lifestyle contrasts sharply with traditional and religious values, which encourage having children, sparking debate in society. This is because the idea of childfree stems from Western culture, which embraces liberal ideology. Liberalism is known to uphold human freedom.

Liberalism in the Islamic context generally emphasizes the use of human reason without considering the text and context of religious teachings as a whole. In Islam, the process of interpreting religious teachings must be carried out with a comprehensive approach through a framework of thought (paradigm). From an Islamic perspective, liberal ideology is inconsistent with the basic values of Islamic teachings, because the spirit of liberalism, which emphasizes freedom, often neglects the purity of religious teachings. Liberalism is considered not to lead to the welfare of the people, but rather tends to lead to harm (madharat). This is because its adherents make a false sense of freedom as absolute truth, prioritize limited human reason as the benchmark for truth, and ultimately view sharia or the rules of Allah SWT as a restrictive limitation.

Meanwhile, in Quraish Shihab's view, Western liberalism focuses on unrestrained individual freedom, which can conflict with Islamic teachings on social and spiritual responsibility. This demonstrates a fundamental difference between Western liberalism and the concept of freedom in Islam, which emphasizes the harmony between individual freedom and religious norms. Although the Quran encourages freedom, Quraish Shihab also emphasizes that this freedom is not absolute and must be balanced with the responsibilities and limitations set by Islamic teachings. This shows that the freedom recommended by the Quran is not liberalism with unlimited individual freedom, but rather freedom directed toward good goals and in accordance with divine teachings.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that childfree stems from Western culture, which contradicts Islamic religious values, where the purpose of marriage is to have children. This is the reason behind Quraish Shihab's rejection of childfree.

2. Childfree is a Pessimistic Attitude

From Quraish Shihab's statement regarding his opinion on childfree and the background to Quraish Shihab's rejection of childfree, it is stated that "in life we are taught to be optimistic, but optimism accompanied by caution"; this statement suggests that childfree is a pessimistic attitude that must be avoided by Muslims.

In Islam, optimism is a recommended attitude, meaning having good thoughts about Allah SWT and not giving up easily. Pessimism, on the other hand, contradicts Islamic teachings, as it is considered a form of prejudice and weakens faith. Optimism reflects the belief that Allah always provides the best, while pessimism is often associated with despair and resignation to circumstances.

In the Al-Qur'an there are verses that represent the meaning of optimism, namely, Ash-Syuara'[19] : 62, Al-Isra'[17]:57, Yusuf [12]:87, Az-Zumar [39]:53, An-Nahl [16]:27, Al-Anbiya [21]:90, Ali Imran [3]:139. These verses contain a lot of faith. Buya Hamka's interpretation of the optimism verse is that Allah forbids His servants from despairing of the breadth of His mercy, and the habit of despair is only possessed by disbelievers, Allah forbids becoming weak and sad in the face of trials, is confident that Allah will help His servants and show the way of salvation, Allah commands patience because patience is not weakness but strength in self-control, always hope in Allah for His mercy and forgiveness, and feel afraid (khauf) of Him, so that by doing so you can increase closeness (taqarrub) to others. Allah. Optimism is the key to achieving success, which is caused by several things, namely having the quality of contentment in responding to the gifts of God given, having a courageous attitude and a strong mentality in achieving success, fighting earnestly, having faith in everything that has been destined by God, putting one's trust in God after trying one's best, and being consistent or istiqamah, so that one remains steadfast and unwavering in what one believes. Optimism is built on the basis of faith in God to achieve success.

Meanwhile, according to Quraish Shihab (in his video lecture), optimism stems from prayer, trust in God, and fortitude. Prayer is a noble act of worship that provides hope, while trust in God is surrendering to God, and fortitude can foster a positive, objective attitude even amidst the pressures of life.

3. Childfree Is Not the Solution

Quraish Shihab's next statement regarding the background of his rejection of childfree is: "In religion, children are a blessing. When we grow old, we need children. In Islam, we are taught about control, so we can plan the number of children we have, not limit them." From this statement, it can be concluded that being childfree is not a solution for married couples concerned about having children in their household.

According to the author, childfree is a misguided solution, because when problems arise, such as parental failure to raise children, the solution isn't to simply not have children. It's like planting rice that fails, then choosing not to plant at all instead of finding a way to control pests. Furthermore, when there are financial problems, the goal of childfree is more to avoid them than to find a better financial solution. Similarly, concerns about career impacts tend to be more about self-fulfillment than finding a balance between career and family.

Regarding the concerns of husband and wife regarding the existence of children, Quraish Shihab offers a better solution that does not violate Islamic law, namely through family planning, in Islam known as Tanzhim an-Nasl or regulation of offspring (control). This means that by participating in the KB (Family Planning) program, a husband and wife have made efforts to plan the spacing of children so that parents can provide breast milk and early childhood education optimally to their children. Meanwhile, Tahdid an-Nasl or restriction/elimination of births, namely sterilization, abortion, termination of descent and infertility, is forbidden in Islam. The following are pregnancy prevention methods that are permitted by Islam (Bakry, 2016):

a. Natural Contraception

1) Azl. Pregnancy prevention can be achieved through azl, which involves ejaculating sperm outside the wife's vagina. From an Islamic perspective, azl is permissible because it does not result in permanent infertility. Several hadiths support the permissibility of azl, including the following:

عن جابر رضي الله عنه :كُنَّا نَعْزِلُ على عَهْدِ رسولِ الله صل الله عليه و سلم " , فَبَلَغَهُ ذلك فَلَمْ يَنْهَنَا (رواه مسلم)"

From Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him): "We performed azl during the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and we conveyed it to him and the Prophet did not forbid us."

Based on this hadith, azl is permissible. This is because azl is a natural method of preventing pregnancy. If the husband ejaculates, or ejaculates sperm into his wife's uterus, the chance of pregnancy is high.

2) Calendar. Pregnancy prevention using the calendar method involves engaging in sexual intercourse based on the wife's infertile period, as determined by her menstrual cycle and ovulation. From an Islamic perspective, the calendar method is permissible, as there is no evidence to prohibit it. This aligns with the following Islamic principles:

الأَصْلُ فِي الأَشْيَاءِ الإِبَاحَةُ حَتَّى يَّدُلَّ الدَّلِيلُ على التَّحْرِيْمِ

"The basic law of everything is that it is permissible until there is evidence that it is forbidden."

b. Modern Contraception

1) Condom, namely an object made of latex rubber which is then worn on the male genitals during intercourse to prevent sperm from entering the wife's uterus. The use of condoms as a contraceptive is compared to azl whose illat is equally not releasing sperm into the wife's genitals. The Islamic perfective regarding condoms is permissible. Because condoms are compared to azl whose law is also permissible.
2) Injections. Preventing pregnancy with injections is legally permissible. This is because preventing pregnancy through injections is temporary and does not harm women and is effective in preventing pregnancy.
3) Implants. These devices are inserted under the skin in the upper arm and are effective in preventing pregnancy for 3 to 6 years. The Islamic perspective on these implants is that they are permissible because they are temporary and harmless.
4) The IUD (Intrauterine Device), commonly known as the IUD, is inserted through the vagina. This method of birth control is acceptable because it's neither permanent nor harmful.

5) The Pill. Contraceptive pills taken by the wife are permissible because they are temporary and do not damage the wife's organs or are not harmful to her.

Using contraceptives as mentioned above is permissible in Islam. Because they are temporary, they don't damage the woman's organs or endanger her. However, if they don't suit her body, side effects can often occur, such as weight gain, menstrual irregularities, dizziness, nausea, headaches, and so on. If this occurs, it's best to consult a medical professional (Hariati, Ekawati, & Nugrawati, 2020).

In principle, these birth control methods are permissible in Islam, as they are analogous to the principle of azl, the intention of which is to prevent pregnancy. Furthermore, there are no texts prohibiting or discussing these methods, as they were only recently discovered. As stated in Islamic jurisprudence, these are:

الأَصْلُ فِي الأَشْيَاءِ الإِبَاحَةُ حَتَّى يَدُلَّ الدَّلِيلُ على التَّحْرِيْمِ

"The basic law of everything is that it is permissible until there is evidence that it is forbidden."

The rules of Islamic jurisprudence are based on the words of Allah SWT in QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 29, namely as follows:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُم مَّا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَمِيعًا

"It is He (Allah) who created for you all that is on the earth,"

Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari's interpretation of this verse is that Allah SWT created everything on earth for all humans with the aim of benefiting and benefiting humans (Al-Tabari, 2000). Meanwhile, Abdul Wahhab Khallaf interprets the verse as meaning that everything on earth can be used for the good of humanity (Khallaf, 1990). In this fiqh principle, the word al-Asy-ya' (الأشياء) tends to refer to social transactions. Therefore, all activities related to social transactions are permissible unless there is evidence to the contrary. In Islamic teachings, the fields of ubudiah (ritual) and muamalah (social) are distinguished. In the field of ubudiah, it is required to obey and submit, there is no innovation in it. However, in the field of muamalah, there is a wide space for ijtihad. Contraceptives (contraceptives) are a group of muamalah fields. Thus, of course there is room for ijtihad. The permissibility of contraceptive methods that have been described above is one example of the ijtihad of scholars.

The methods of contraception prohibited in Islam include tubectomy for women and vasectomy for men, also known as sterilization by the general public. Both tubectomy and vasectomy are forbidden because they permanently render both husband and wife infertile, altering their reproductive function. A vasectomy involves cutting the vas deferens (vas deferentia) approximately 2 cm in length and tying both ends with silk thread. A tubectomy involves cutting the fallopian tubes and tying both ends with a ring (fallopian ring) (Zuhdi, 1997). There are opinions among scholars regarding the prohibition of something that makes husband and wife permanently sterile, namely as follows:

وَ يُحَرِّمُ اسْتِعْمَالَ مَا يَقْطَعُ الحَبَلَ مِنْ اَصْلِهِ كَمَا صَرَّحَ بِهِ كَثِيْرُوْنَ وَهُوَ طَاهِرٌ

"And it is forbidden to use anything that can permanently terminate a pregnancy, as many scholars have explained. This is clear."

3. CONCLUSION

The childfree phenomenon, or the choice to remain childless during marriage, is currently gaining popularity among Millennial and Gen Z women in Indonesia. This is due to various reasons, including career priorities and personal freedom, significant financial considerations, mental health awareness, and the influence of social media. Quraish Shihab expressed concern about the childfree phenomenon, as it is considered contrary to Islamic teachings, which encourage having children. He believes that children are a blessing from God, and refusing to have children should not be based solely on individualistic choices but should also consider Islamic values and the well-being of the community.

In several verses of the Qur'an that have been analyzed, the author reveals several verses of the Qur'an that indicate a prohibition on childfree. First, in QS. Al-Anfāl/8: 28 & QS. At-Tagabun/64: 15, which states that children are a test, not a burden. Second, in QS. Lukman /31: 14, which shows how Allah SWT glorifies the role of mothers. Third, in QS. An-Nahl/16: 97, this verse shows that women are also required to be involved

in beneficial activities, both for themselves and their families, as well as for society and their nation, and even humanity as a whole.

There are several arguments/reasons for Quraish Shihab to reject Childfree. First. Marriage protects offspring, the argument is in QS. An-Nahl/16: 72. Second. Allah SWT guarantees the sustenance of every creature, the argument is in QS. Al-Isrā/17: 31. Third. In a career, there needs to be a balance between work and family, the argument is in QS. At-Taubah/9: 71-72, this verse suggests that in balance there needs to be cooperation between wife and husband, in order to achieve mutual success, both in this world and the hereafter. Fourth. Men and women have their respective roles and natures, the argument is in QS. An-Nisā /4: 32, Buya Hamka commented on this verse, namely, there is no need for women to complain and dream of being a man, so that they are free from the obligation to bear children, breastfeed and care for them. A man also does not need to complain because of the weight of his duties, then want to be a woman.

Quraish Shihab's reasons for rejecting childfree are: first, because it is a product of Western culture. This childfree lifestyle has values that contrast sharply with traditional and religious values. Second, childfree is a pessimistic attitude that Muslims should avoid. According to him, religion teaches optimism and considers children a blessing. Our needs in old age greatly require the presence of children. Third, childfree is not a solution. Quraish Shihab stated that Islam teaches about control, so that the number of children can be planned, not limited.

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