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Childfree in The Perspective of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah

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Abstrak:

Childfree adalah sebuah pilihan hidup untuk tidak memiliki anak, setelah atau sebelum menikah, baik itu anak kandung, anak tiri, ataupun anak angkat. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pandangan Abu Hamid al-Ghazali dan Nur Rofiah terhadap *childfree*, mengkaji persamaan dan perbedaan serta menganalisis dasar pemikiran keduanya. Artikel ini merupakan penelitian hukum normatif dengan metode komparasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa menurut al-Ghazali keputusan *childfree* adalah meninggalkan keutamaan (*tarku al-afdhal*), apabila untuk bersenang-senang hukumnya *makruh*. Menurut Nur Rofiah *childfree* diperbolehkan (*mubah*) tetapi harus berdasarkan alasan bijak dan persetujuan pasangan. Nur Rofiah menekankan bahwa menjadi *childfree* tidak menghilangkan tanggung jawab sosial seseorang kepada anak terlantar. Kedua tokoh ini menjelaskan *childfree* bukanlah pilihan yang haram. Perbedaannya, al-Ghazali menyatakan tujuan pernikahan adalah memiliki keturunan, sedangkan menurut Nur Rofiah tujuan pernikahan adalah untuk menemukan ketenangan, kasih sayang dan rahmat. Al-Ghazali menjadikan hadits Rasulullah yang menyeru sahabat untuk menikah dan berketurunan serta memilih wanita yang pengasih dan subur sebagai dasar pentingnya keberadaan anak, berbeda dengan Nur Rofiah yang menyatakan bahwa tujuan pernikahan telah disampaikan dalam Q.S. Ar-Rum ayat 21. Selain untuk menciptakan ketenangan jiwa sebagai pasangan, pernikahan juga untuk berusaha bersama menciptakan dunia yang lebih baik sebagai *khalifah fi al-ardh*.

Kata Kunci: *Childfree*; Pernikahan; Hak Reproduksi Perempuan.

Abstract:

Childfree is a life decision of a person or couple for not having children, before or after marriage, be it biological children, stepchildren, or adopted children. This article aims to describe the perspective of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah on *childfree*, examine the similarities and differences and analyze the basis of their thoughts. This article is normative legal research

with a comparative approach. The results show that according to al-Ghazali, the decision to be childfree is leaving virtues (*tarku al-afdhal*), if it was chosen because of selfishness or for having fun, childfree is *makruh*. According to Nur Rofiah, being childfree is permissible (*mubah*), but it must be based on wise reason and be approved by both parties. She emphasizes that being childfree does not eliminate the social responsibilities of neglected children. Both al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah agree childfree is not forbidden (*haram*). The difference is that al-Ghazali discusses the main purpose of marriage is to have children. In contrast, According to Nur Rofiah, the main purpose of marriage is to find tranquillity, affection and mercy. The basis of al-Ghazali's perspective is the hadith of *Rasulullah*, which calls on his friends to get married and have children, and his recommendation to marry a loving and fertile woman. Unlike Nur Rofiah, she discusses that the main purpose of marriage is written in Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21. Besides creating peace of mind as a couple, marriage is for making a better world together as *Khalifah fi al-ardh*.

Keywords: Childfree; Marriage; Women Reproductive Right.

Introduction

Marriage is part of *Rasulullah*'s Sunnah, which has been highly valued and regarded as being half of one's faith in Islam to create peace of mind and love between men and women. It was created by Allah to provide a foundation for family life and the whole of society. For Muslims, having children and educating them to be a righteous generation is a noble gift and mandate from Allah SWT. In Islam, children are investments in the world and the hereafter.¹

But behind many virtues of children, there are some people who choose to live without children or commonly called 'voluntary childlessness' or 'childfree'. According to Rachel Chrastil, a professor of history at Xavier University, the condition of childlessness, whether by nature or choice has been made by women for centuries.² As stated by Adi Hidayat,³ someone who chooses not to have children has existed since the time of *Jahiliyyah*.⁴ It became the cause of the revelation of the verse about the virtues of getting married (Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21), having children (Q.S. An-Nahl verse 72), and guaranteed sustenance from Allah (Q.S. An-Nur verse 32).

Based on data from the World's Highest Childlessness Levels in East Asia written by Tomas Sobotka, over the past 3 decades, East Asia's most economically developed countries have experienced high childlessness rates (being childfree in their marriage until deciding to be single). In Singapore, 28% of women born from 1975 to 1980 were

¹ Ummu Shofi, *Kiat-kiat Mendidik Anak Ala Rasulullah Agar Cahaya Mahta Makin Bersinar* (Surakarta: Afra, 2007), 66.

² Rachel Chrastil, "Not Having Kids Is Nothing New. What Centuries of History Tell Us about Childlessness Today," *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2019, accessed August 31, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/09/05/not-having-kids-is-nothing-new-what-centuries-history-tell-us-about-childlessness-today/>

³ An Islamic scholar from Indonesia, a writer who has several works in Arabic and Indonesian, founder of Quantum Akhyar Institute, a foundation engaged in Islamic studies and the development of da'wah which has several outstanding programs: *Sekolah Terbuka* UAH, *Kaderisasi Ulama*, At-Taisir Learning Center (TFT program, Berbaq Program, Professional Class Program), Umrah and Tours and scholarships.

⁴ Adi Hidayat, "[Klik Adi] UAH Bicara Tentang Childfree - Ustadz Adi Hidayat," *Adi Hidayat Official*, August 27, 2021, accessed Nov 13, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNgoRAPqSHc&t=10s>.

childless at the time of the 2020 census. Japan experienced a steady increase in childlessness among women born in the early 1950s until 1974–1976 when its level peaked at 28%. Childlessness is still higher in Hong Kong, where it peaked at 35% among women born in 1971, and then start to fall, reaching 30% among those born in 1979.⁵ The decline in the rate of growth also occurred in Indonesia. According to the population census issued by BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics), the population growth rate in 2010-2020 shows a 1.25% decline from the previous period in 2000-2010 which was 1.49%.⁶ The population in 1971 was only 119.21 million, then in 1990 it was 179.38 million, and in 2020 it was 270.20 million,⁷ an increase of 32.57 million compared to the 2010 population census.

In the book *Childfree and Happy*, Victoria Tunggono said there are many reasons for being childfree, such as financial and mental concerns, career, hobby, physical capacity, philosophical objections and environmental reasons. What they most agree is, children are not an important part for them of achieving happiness in life.⁸ Although childfree can be the choice of men or women, as people who have the ability to get pregnant and childbirth, women get more negative views in society.⁹ According to the Professor of Sociology Bagong Suryanto, the reasons for childfree which come from women is because the indicators of women's social status and existence are changing with time, from what used to be seen from the domestic sphere (how many children they could bear), now based on the public sector (their success in pursuing a career, achievements and other new indicators).¹

This issue has also been discussed in several studies. First, research by Ladan Rahbari, a student at Ghent University, a Center for Research on culture and gender in Belgium, in the *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies* in 2020 with the title 'Politics of Non-Motherhood in Shi'a Islam: Imagery and Narratives around Fatemeh-Masoumeh of Qom.' Ladan's research explains the various reasons why Lady Masoumeh as a woman with a high level of divinity and well-known among the Shi'ites is not married and has no children. This study also explains that there is no obligation for women to be biological mothers in the Quran, and allows women to take part in the world of business and politics as Khadijah and Aisyah did. This research also discussed about women who are not obliged to become mothers, and they can choose to have a career or not. The difference is, it focused on Fatemeh Masoumeh's live and this article focused on Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's perspective on childfree.

Second, research by Ghea Teresa, a student of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Sanata Dharma in 2014 with the title "Motif dan Generativitas Individu Voluntary Childlessness". Ghea's research also explain the family life of voluntary

⁵ Tomas Sobotka, "World's Highest Childlessness Levels in East Asia," *Ined*, no. 595 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3917/popsoc.595.0001>.

⁶ Badan Pusat Statistik, "Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2020," *BPS*, January 2021, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.bps.go.id/pressrelease/2021/01/21/1854/hasil-sensus-penduduk-2020.html>.

⁷ Badan Pusat Statistik, "Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2020," *BPS*, January 2021, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.bps.go.id/pressrelease/2021/01/21/1854/hasil-sensus-penduduk-2020.html>.

⁸ Victoria Tunggono, *Childfree & Happy* (Yogyakarta: EA Books, 2021), 21.

⁹ Shelvy Susanti and Nurchayati "Menikah Tanpa Keturunan: Masalah Psikologis yang Dialami Perempuan Menikah Tanpa Anak dan Strategi Coping dalam Mengatasinya," *Character : Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi* 6, no 01 (2019): 9-10, <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/character/article/view/27773>

¹ Bagong Suryanto, "Professof Bagong Views Childfree Phenomenon as a New Women Development," *Universitas Airlangga*, August 31, 2021, accessed Sept 6, 2021, <http://news.unair.ac.id/2021/08/26/prof-bagong-nilai-fenomena-childfree-sebagai-perkembangan-baru-perempuan/>

childlessness (childfree), but it focuses on the life experiences of voluntary childlessness individuals (deciding to have a family without children) in prenatal society, starting from the impact of their commitment, to the reasons they persist with the decision. Third, research belonging to Dhea Nila Aryeni, a student of the Faculty of Social Science Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia with the title *Keharmonisan Keluarga Tanpa Sang Buah Hati (Studi Fenomenologi Pasangan Suami-Istri dalam Keluarga Kontemporer di Kota Bandung)*. It discusses the decision to have a family without children (childfree), but it focuses on reasons and happiness in family life without children. Both of these explain childfree from a social perspective, and this article focuses on identifying the law regarding the decision to not have children from the perspective of Islamic scholars.

Based on Article 28B paragraph 1 UUD 1945, everyone has the right to establish a family and to procreate based upon lawful marriage. Having a child is not an obligation. As stated in Article 28 E paragraph 2, The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia has guaranteed the freedom of a person to express his thoughts and attitudes by his conscience, including to be childfree. But, as a country with a Muslim majority society, this phenomenon leads to some pros and cons. Being childfree is considered contrary to the human untainted nature (*fitrah al-salimah*) to ensure the sustainability of offspring.¹ This is also against the purpose of marriage and the prophet's advice in procreating future generations who can realize goodness for country and religion.

To get more knowledge about childfree which is considered as a movement against the nature of women and the purpose of marriage in general, 'the woman's reproductive right' should get the most attention in society. In this article, the perspective of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali¹ as a classical Islamic scholar and Nur Rofiah¹ as a contemporary Islamic female scholar will be discussed. These two scholars explain the marriage life in detail, divide the roles of husband and wife into 'fair in different nuances', and give many married pieces of advice to avoid mistakes in making decisions.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, known as al-Ghazali in his great work *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din*¹ explained the main purpose of marriage is having children. It is following the creation of the penis and sperm for men, and the womb for women, which God then gives lust to each of the men and women to reproduce and preserve God's creation.¹ Indeed, the decision of childfree is contrary to the main purpose of marriage in al-Ghazali's perspective.

¹ Faizal Kurniawan, *Keluarga dan Budaya dalam Tinjauan Sosiologis* (Jakarta, G4 Publishing, 2020), 15.

¹ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, known as al-Ghazali is one of the most prominent cleric, an Islamic expert who masters the several disciplines (philosophers, theologians, jurists, and mystics) of Sunni Islam.

¹ Nur Rofiah is a lecturer of Quranic Studies at the Graduate and Post-graduate Programme of *Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu al-Quran (PTIQ)*, gender activists, researchers, writers and academics. She is also the founder of *Lingkar Ngaji KGI* and active as a speaker in seminars related to feminist, gender and child issues.

¹ *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* or *Al-Ihya'* is one of al-Ghazali masterpiece that discusses the rules and principles in purifying the human soul. This book discussed about nature and Muslim life, such as ritual, moral, and social and household issues, including the purpose and manners of marriage in the second quarter (norms of daily life)

¹ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, translated by Ismail Yakub (Medan: Percetakan Imballo, 1965), 1122.

On the other hand, Nur Rofiah through her perspective ‘the Lens of Substantive Justice’¹ from her forum *Lingkar Ngaji KGI*¹ discusses that the main purpose of marriage is to get happiness/peace of mind (*sakinah*) based on love (*mawaddah warahmah*) with three levels of ethics in every action, those are *halal* (permissible/not according to religion), *thayyib* (good/not for life) and *ma'ruf* (appropriate/not in behavior).¹ According to her, having a reproductive organ, the ability to conceive and breastfeed is a natural condition (*qudrat*), but using it is an option (*ikhtiar*).

From these findings, this article explains the research on the concept of ‘purpose of marriage’ to get the perspective on childfree of the two scholars. Therefore, this article identifies childfree in the view of al-Ghazali in his book *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* and Nur Rofiah based on her perspective ‘The Lens of Substantive Justice’ in *Lingkar Ngaji KGI*, examining the similarities and the differences between them, and analyze the basis of their perspective on childfree.

Method of Research

This article is normative legal research conducted by examining library research¹. It uses a comparative approach because this article wants to get Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah’s perspectives on childfree issues by comparing the main purpose of marriage. The legal materials used are primary legal materials, such as *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* (Revival of Religious Sciences) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. *Nalar Kritis Muslimah* by Nur Rofiah and the material from *KGI (Keadilan Gender Islam)* Islamic Gender Justice webinar with the theme "*Childfree dan Childcare Perspektif Islam*", and secondary legal materials² such as *Childfree & Happy* by Victoria Tunggono and other books, interpretation script and journals that discuss the purpose of marriage and existence of children in the family. In processing legal materials, the researcher examines several sources related to the study of the childfree issue using the content analysis and comparative technique.

Childfree in the Perspective of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah

In the Second Quarter (Norms of Daily Life or *Rub' al-'adat*) on the Manners of Marriage, al Ghazali as a classical Islamic scholar explained that the scholars have different opinions regarding marriage. Some scholars agree marriage is more important than celibacy and some scholars state celibacy is preferable.² In general, al-Ghazali argues if a man has sexual desire and he is afraid of committing adultery, marriage is preferable for him. But if a man didn't need it, celibacy is preferable. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that married life is a preparation for the hereafter, people can get the happiness of the world and the hereafter at the same time.

¹ The perspective that consciously integrates the five biological experiences of women to be considered (menstruation, pregnancy, giving birth, puerperal, and breastfeeding) so as not to get sick and the five social experiences (stigmatization, marginalization, subordination, violence, and double burden) so that they don't happen at all which has goal to make a better life for men and women.

¹ *Lingkar Ngaji Keadilan Gender Islam (KGI)* is a forum for people who want to gain knowledge related to the values of gender justice in Islamic perspective. In this forum, Nur Rofiah promoting her perspective on equality, building awareness about the humanity of women in all aspect

¹ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 56.

¹ Mahmud, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Bandung: CV Pustaka Setia, 2011), 31.

² Soerjono Sukanto and Sri Mamudi, *Penelitian Hukum Normative Suatu Tinjauan Singkat* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2003), 23.

² Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1113.

As written on *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din*, the main purpose of marriage is having children.² It is following the creation of the penis and sperm for men and the womb for women, which God then gives lust to each of the men and women to reproduce and preserve God's creation.² According to al-Ghazali, the benefits of marriage are:² (1) Having children and descendants, (2) Satisfying the sexual desire (*shahwah*) through lawful sexual intercourse, (3) Comforting the tired soul by the companionship of the wife, (4) Assisted in taking care of housework, (5) Doing a virtuous deed by maintaining his family. Al-Ghazali believe efforts to have offspring become an act of worship from four sides because it related to:² (1) Pursuing God's love for maintaining human existence; (2) Pursuing Rasulullah's love and making him proud for multiplying his followers; (3) Looking for the blessing of the child's pray; (4) Seeking intercession through the death of the young child.

On the other hand, According to Nur Rofiah, the contemporary Islamic female scholar and Indonesian women's rights activist, the main purpose of marriage is to get happiness/peace of mind (*sakinah*).² Every action in marriage must involve two parties to develop the concept of a relationship² and must consider the ethics of *halalan thayyiban* and *ma'rufan*. "*Halal*" pays attention to the law regarding the legality of religious cases, "*thayyib*" pays attention to whether a case is good or not, and "*ma'ruf*" pays attention to whether a case is appropriate or not.² Marriage is one form of Islamic worship. It legalizes sexual relations between two parties in a dignified manner (*Mu'asyarah bi al-Ma'ruf*) and does not diminish his body as a servant of God. As stated at Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 30, both husband and wife have an inherent status as vicegerents on earth (*Khalifah fi al-ardh*). Islam builds awareness that men and women are created from one soul (*nafsul wahidah*, Q.S. An-Nisa verse 1)² and then created into a physical figure. They must learn together and manage their souls to find tranquillity, affection and mercy in life (Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21) until dying in a state of peace (*nafs al muthmainnah*).³ Marriage should make benefits and good impact on both parties and society.

There are several principles of marriage in Islam, those are:³ (1) *Zawaj/* pair or complement each other (Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 187, Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21); (2) *Mitsaqan Ghalidzan /* Solemn covenant (Q.S. An-Nisa verse 21); (3) *Muasyarah Bil Maruf/* Polite and civilized behavior (Q.S. An-Nisa verse 19); (4) *Musyawahar/* Warm and intense communication (Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 233); (5) *Taradhin/* Willing and sincere (Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 233). These principles need to be considered in every decision-making, including the decision to have children or be childfree.

² Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1122.

² Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1122.

² Imam Ghazali, *Ringkasan Ihya' Ulumuddin*, translated by 'Abdul Rosyad Shiddiq (Jakarta: Akbar Media, 2008), 149.

² Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1121.

² Nur Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah* (Bandung: Afkaruna, 2020), 56.

² Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Perempuan (Bukan) Sumber Fitnah!* (Bandung: Afkaruna, 2021), 14.

² Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 56.

² Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 61.

³ Tabayyun Pasinringi, "Bagaimana Islam Menilai 'Childfree'? Sebuah Penjelasan Lengkap (Speaker: Nur Rofiah)," *Magdalene*, August 31, 2021, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://magdalene.co/story/bagaimana-islam-menilai-childfree-sebuah-penjelasan-lengkap> accessed Feb 23, 2022.

³ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 125.

The decision to be childfree raises a negative stigma from society. In his book, besides showing many hadiths containing recommendations for marrying and multiplying offspring, al-Ghazali explains many disadvantages of marriage that must be considered. Some of these points are:³ (1) The inability to seek to gain lawful; (2) Failure to uphold wives' rights (3) Distractions from remembering Allah. These things are also related to the reason of a person/couple who does not want to have children because children like a wife who also have the right that must be fulfilled.

In Fiqh, several equivalent cases can be used as ways for husband and wife to be childfree or refuse to have a child, those are not marrying at all, the decision not to have penetrative sex, or with '*azl* (releasing sperm outside the vagina).³ Al-Ghazali explained that '*azl* or preventing sperm from entering the vagina is permissible, not to be *makruh* or *haram*. It same as choosing not to get married at all and not having sex after marriage, which is just leaving the virtues (*tarku al-afdhal*).³ The Quran does not prohibit birth control, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Thus, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that family planning is permissible in Islam.³ So, this article concluded that al-Ghazali allowing '*azl* is not for childfree (not having children at all), but more for birth control.

According to al-Ghazali, there are several legal motives that encourage someone to choose not to have children, such as³ : (1) A master has sex with his slave in the '*azl* way (he did not want to have children) so that the slave remains his property; (2) To keep his wife beauty; (3) Fear of doing illegal things because of need to provide for many children. Even though it seems contrary to *tawakkal* about Allah's sustenance, this motive is still allowed, unlike the reasons related to bad intentions or wrong beliefs in the Sunnah of the Prophet, such as deciding not to have children because too afraid of giving birth to a baby girl (the belief of *jahiliyyah*), or they don't want to get pregnant and have children because they are too hygienic.³

On the other hand, al-Ghazali likens God as a master who hands over seeds and agricultural equipment to his slaves (humans) to work on them. People who decide to be childfree/ single are like turning away from agriculture, wasting seeds and available equipment that Allah has given (Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 223).³ It is *makruh* to leave the Prophet's command and the purpose of the body's creation which also be worship because it follows what Allah loves. Al-Ghazali believed the man who had a pious child will get the reward of *tasabbub* as being the cause of the child's birth. As stated, "*Indeed a man will have intercourse with his wife, and the intercourse caused the reward of a son who*

³ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1143.

³ Nano R. Auliya and Muhammad K. Umam, "Childfree Pasca Pernikahan: Keadilan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan Perspektif Masdar Farid Mas'udi dan Al-Ghazali," *Al-Manhaj: Journal of Indonesian Islamic Family Law* 3, no. 2 (2021): 160, <http://dx.doi.org/10.19105/al-manhaj.v3i2.5325>.

³ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-din*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1997), 51.

³ Syekh Muhammad Yusuf Qardhawi, *Halal dan Haram dalam Islam* (Surabaya: Bina Ilmu, 1993), 270.

³ Nano R. Auliya and Muhammad K. Umam, "Childfree Pasca Pernikahan: Keadilan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan Perspektif Masdar Farid Mas'udi dan Al-Ghazali," 160, <http://dx.doi.org/10.19105/al-manhaj.v3i2.5325>.

³ Nano R. Auliya and Muhammad K. Umam, "Childfree Pasca Pernikahan: Keadilan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan Perspektif Masdar Farid Mas'udi dan Al-Ghazali," 162-163, <http://dx.doi.org/10.19105/al-manhaj.v3i2.5325>.

³ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1125.

strives for jihad fi sabilillah and then martyrs."³ . So by releasing sperm⁹ into the wife's womb, the husband has already got the reward for that.

But, getting married to have children also has consequences for earning a living for them. Islam places great importance on the quality of a child as a new generation. As stated in QS. An-Nisa verse 9⁴ , protecting children from destruction is more important than having them.⁴ The purpose of having wife and children for some people is to get pleasure in the world and many virtues for the hereafter. However, many people are amused by nature, and some people are not even interested in marriage and children.⁴ In the last, according to al-Ghazali everything depends on the needs and conditions of each individual.⁴

According to Nur Rofiah, childfree could be a response to the marriage/ family system that exists to this day and has a problem for one party.⁴ It is considered a movement against the nature of women who have a womb to get pregnant and birth. Although childfree can be the choice of men or women. But in the patriarchal⁴ society and as people who can get pregnant and childbirth, women get more negative views from society.⁴ It is closely related to the awareness of women's humanity, where the position of women in any history is very far from 'independence'.

Deciding to be childfree seemed to leave the prophet's advice to *ummah* to marry and have many children. But, this is related to women's reproductive rights as someone who will do and experience a long process of pregnancy and childbirth, as stated in the Quran (Q.S. Al-Ahqaf verse 15) by pain (*adza*), fatigue (*kurhan*), also great pain and fatigue (*wahnan 'ala wahnin*)⁴ . According to her, having a reproductive organ, the ability to conceive and breastfeed is a natural condition (*qudrat*), but using it is an option (*ikhtiar*). Women and men also have different life experiences and conditions, so it is important to always consider what kind of condition they are in. Some families expect better life and condition if they have children, some feel some bad things will happen if they have children, like poverty, domestic violence, or others.⁴

Islam encourages its follower to have children because children and family is one of the ways to get closer to Allah. Children are soul conditioning, but children also have

³ Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Husaini al-Zabidi, *Ithafu al-Sadah al-Muttaqin bi Syarh Ihya Ulum al-Din*, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Tarikh al-'Arabi, 1994), 379-380.

⁴ Shahih International, "Quran surah An Nisa 9 (QS 4: 9) in Arabic and English Translation," *Al-Quran English*, July 1, 2019, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.alquranenglish.com/quran-surah-an-nisa-9-q4-9-in-arabic-and-english-translation#Sahih-International>.

⁴ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1148.

⁴ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1138.

⁴ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1149.

⁴ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 35-36, and Nur Rofiah, "Childfree dan Childcare Perspektif Islam," *Webinar Lingkar Ngaji KGI (Keadilan Gender Islam)*-Zoom Meeting, August 27, 2021.

⁴ Patriarchy is a system in which men have all or most of the power and importance in a society or group <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/patriarchy>.

⁴ Shelvy Susanti and Nurhayati "Menikah Tanpa Keturunan: Masalah Psikologis yang Dialami Perempuan Menikah Tanpa Anak dan Strategi Coping dalam Mengatasinya," 9-10, <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/character/article/view/27773>.

⁴ The Qur'an illustrate 'great pain and fatigue' with term '*wahnan 'ala wahnin*' which means that day after day, week after week and month after month the fetus in the womb is getting bigger and makes pregnant women feels tired, heavy, and all of the pain increases as their gestation progresses.

⁴ Webinar Lingkar Ngaji KGI (Keadilan Gender Islam). Zoom Meeting: August 27, 2021.

the potential to be enemies for parents (Q.S. Al-Anfal verse 28,⁴ Q.S. At-Taghabun verse⁹ 14⁵). Therefore, the recommendation of having children is strongly bound by a commitment to the responsibility to God. Having a child is the husband and wife's choice and consequence personally. Deciding to have children requires extraordinary preparation, they must be educated properly. So, people must understand their abilities and responsibilities for their choices, because as stated in Q.S. Al-An'am verse 94,⁵ humans as spiritual beings will return to their God individually, and take responsibility for all their deeds to Allah as themselves.⁵

According to her, the most crucial thing is, for men and women, married or single, childfree or not, humans have an inherent mandate as vicegerents on earth (*Khalifah fi al-ardh*) who have to realize the broadest goodness on earth, provides the common good, both inside and outside the home.⁵ Although there are many explanations about the virtues of marriage and having children, the only parameter of human quality before Allah is piety (*taqwa*). Someone single and pious is better than a husband and wife who are not pious. Similarly, a pious married couple is better than a single person who is not pious.⁵ The purpose of human life is to be the best version of themselves. Everyone must recognize their respective potentials and realize goodness as much as possible based on faith in Allah.

So, the decision to have children must be based on mutual agreement, especially for women who experience various kinds of physical experiences from the process of getting pregnant until giving birth.⁵ Marriage in Islam aims⁵ to bring peace of mind to both parties. Nur Rofiah believes that apart from sex, women have their priorities. This is also different from the *jahiliyyah* era where the husband has full authority over his wife in making every decision. All choices must be centered on goodness, so the decision to be childfree is also not something completely wrong.⁵ Islam wants to create a full blessing system for the universe, including women who also want to spread benefits to society. Islam is not only required to be *shalih-shalihah* (a good person), but also *mushlih-mushlihah* (conciliator, reformer, people who bring improvement and change in life). A person's quality standard is judged by the commitment of *Tauhid* and piety to God. *Tauhid* is the boost to make great benefits, good deeds, or good actions on the earth. So All decisions, especially a long impact-decisions must be based on the common good and the

⁴ Shahih International, "Quran⁹surah Al-Anfal 28 (QS 8: 28) in Arabic and English Translation," *Al-Quran English*, July 1, 2019, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.alquranenglish.com/quran-surah-al-anfal-28-qs-8-28-in-arabic-and-english-translation#Sahih-International>.

⁵ Shahih International, "Quran⁹surah At-Taghabun 64 (QS 14: 64) in Arabic and English Translation," *Al-Quran English*, July 1, 2019, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.alquranenglish.com/quran-surah-at-tagabun-14-qs-64-14-in-arabic-and-english-translation#Sahih-International>.

⁵ Shahih International, "Quran⁹surah Al-An'am 94 (QS 6: 94) in Arabic and English Translation," *Al-Quran English*, July 1, 2019, accessed February 19, 2022, <https://www.alquranenglish.com/quran-surah-al-anam-94-qs-6-94-in-arabic-and-english-translation#Sahih-International>.

⁵ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 85.

⁵ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 40 & 189, and Nur Rofiah, "Childfree dan Childcare Perspektif Islam," Zoom Meeting: August 27, 2021.

⁵ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 54.

⁵ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 43.

⁵ Tabayyun Pasinringi, "Milik Anak Atau Tidak, Islam Anjurkan Pilihan yang Maslahat," (Speaker: Nur Rofiah)," *Magdalene*, October 18, 2021, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://magdalene.co/story/miliki-anak-atau-tidak-islam-anjurkan-pilihan-yang-maslahat> and Nur Rofiah, "Childfree dan Childcare Perspektif Islam," Zoom Meeting: August 27, 2021.

principle of piety to Allah (*taqwa*) and the purpose of marriage, such as *sakinah* (peace of the soul), *mawaddah* (affection) and *rahmah* (compassion).⁵ 7

Being childfree or single can have an impact on the wider benefit. Like the decision of the scholars not to marry for being wise to their followers without having to violate their obligations as a father or husband and as much as possible avoid destruction.⁵ So, people should be able to distinguish childfree reasons because they are selfish or want to spread benefits as widely as possible. Nur Rofiah emphasized that being childfree does not eliminate the social responsibilities to neglected children, orphans, disability, child labor, victims of domestic violence, pedophilia, sexual violence against children and children in conflict areas. The best of humans are those who are the best versions of themselves so that they can give benefit and good impact.

The Similarities and The Differences of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's Perspective on Childfree

The similarities between Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's perspectives on childfree are: (1) Both al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah agree that there is no prohibition on being childfree, so they do not consider childfree as something forbidden (*haram*)⁵; (2) Both al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah explain the virtues and problems of having children, and they do not require a person to have children. Deciding to be childfree is not a sin, but according to al-Ghazali, many virtues are lifted (*tarkul afdhal*); (3) Both al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah strongly emphasize that both husband and wife must equally fulfill the rights of their partners to create a *sakinah* (peace of the soul), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion) family.

The differences between Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's perspective on childfree are: (1) Al-Ghazali as a male and classical Islamic scholar emphasized the male leadership. He taught how men lead the family well. Meanwhile, Nur Rofiah as a female and contemporary Islamic scholar emphasized the balance-gender leadership. She prioritizes the condition of women in deciding childfree as a person who will get the long impact of pregnancy. She considers that in the matter of having children, the decision should be more on women because women will get the impact and many changes in having children; (2) Al-Ghazali likens someone who has organs to reproduce as a servant who is given seeds, field and agricultural equipment from his master which should be used as well as possible. Meanwhile, Nur Rofiah said that having a reproductive organ, the ability to conceive and breastfeed is a natural condition (*qudrat*), but using it is an option (*ikhtiar*). She prioritizes family circumstances and their choices (based on wise reason and pleasure or *tarodhin*), especially women as vicegerents on earth who have the right to live in a meaningful life with a variety of ways; (3) Al-Ghazali with his wisdom in seeing the unstable socio-political conditions divided positions fairly. He prioritizes the division of labor between husband and wife in the public and domestic sectors. He honors women by placing them in domestic positions and making them the main educators for children. The discussions about women are mostly associated with children and household work, including the needs of family and husbands. While Nur Rofiah is anxious about seeing reality. She voiced the problems that women feel, from

⁵ Nur Rofiah, "Childfree dan Childcare Perspektif Islam," Zoom Meeting: August 27, 2021.

⁵ Tabayyun Pasinringi, "Bagaimana Islam Menilai 'Childfree'? Sebuah Penjelasan Lengkap (Speaker: Nur Rofiah)," accessed January 4, 2022, <https://magdalene.co/story/bagaimana-islam-menilai-childfree-sebuah-penjelasan-lengkap> accessed Feb 23, 2022.

⁵ Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law.

restraint to domestic violence with her persistence. She prioritizes the equal sharing of responsibilities and women's freedom doing their roles whether contributing in the public/domestic sphere, being a mother/ career woman or with/without children as long as remains responsible for neglected children and social roles; (4) From the work of al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah, the author concludes that decision of childfree for people who are capable of having them for having fun is *makruh*⁶ because they leave many virtues (*tarkul afdhal*), leave the command of the prophet and the mandate of Allah to preserve human beings. Meanwhile, as long as both partners are equally trying to spread the benefit to the world, Nur Rofiah is more inclined to permissible (*mubah*).

The Basis of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's Perspective on Childfree

The thought and interpretation are closely related to the social context and generally raise after experiencing a long social dialectical process. To understand the thinking of the scholars objectively, two things need to be considered: intellectual development and the objective reality surrounding his life. Knowledge of intellectual development can avoid them from subjectivity and simplification. Meanwhile, knowledge of the objective reality will be able to capture the factors that encourage them to articulate their ideas, views and attitudes, even the methods adopted to realize the ideas.⁶ Al-Ghazali lived in an era where usually men stand to be a leader and women do the domestic work. In contrast with Nur Rofiah's era where women were able to access the same education as men and began to move towards the desired career.

According to al-Ghazali, marriage is required to have children as a factor for the sustainability of the human population in the world, so child is the main purpose of marriage.⁶ It is based on the Prophet's command to *ummah "Marry so that you have offspring"*⁶ and the Prophet Muhammad's suggestion to find a loving and fertile wife, based on the hadith: "*Marry the one who is fertile and loving, for I will be proud of your great number before the nations on the Day of Resurrection*"⁶ Although in his book women are often described as a second role behind their husbands, as a scholar and Sufi who wants to improve human morals, he taught how men lead their households well, including paying attention to the rights of wives and family members. Men have great obligations to family. Al-Ghazali also advises men to be selective in choosing women (righteous and have the potential for having many children) because, in addition to helping men with completing household matters, women are also expected able to have many children for pursuing God and the prophet's love and seeking the blessings of child's pray.

In the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, he wrote that he experienced a lot of heartbreak and left Baghdad with all the luxury and honor (488 H / 1095 AD) with a fondness for seclusion (*khalwat*), I'tikaf and worshiping at the Damascus Mosque, and moved to Baitul Maqdis. He continued his journey for Hajj and then a pilgrimage to the Prophet's Tomb.⁶ The seclusion (*khalwat*) and I'tikaf made him see that creation of Allah must continue to exist, including marriage as the main way of continuing offspring, as in his book he explained that "*Everyone who does not want to marry is turning away from agriculture,*

⁶ Disliked or offensive act. ⁰

⁶ M. Atho Mudzhar, *Membaca Gelombang Ijtihad antara Tradisi dan Liberasi* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1998), 105.

⁶ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1122.

⁶ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din*, 25.

⁶ Sunan an-Nasa'i 3227, Book⁴26, Hadith 32 <https://sunnah.com/nasai:3227>.

⁶ Heris Hermawan and Yaya Sunarya, *Filsafat Islam* (Bandung: CV Insan Mandiri, 2011), 90.

wasting seeds and agricultural equipment, squandering the purpose of events and wisdom, which is understood from the evidence of creation written on the limbs with the divine inscription, not with lettered and voiced writing, so it can be read by anyone who has the eyes of a divine hearth (*bashirah rabbaniyyah*) that are translucent to obtain subtle *azaliyah* wisdom.”⁶

On the other hand, According to Nur Rofiah, the main purpose of marriage is to get happiness/peace of mind (*sakinah*) based on Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21 with three levels of ethics in every action, those are *halal* (permissible/not according to religion), *thayyib* (good/not for life) and *ma'ruf* (appropriate/not in behavior).⁶ Nur Rofiah as a contemporary Islamic female scholar and the women's rights activist conveys her thoughts through various considerations of goodness through the Lens of Substantive Justice, the perspective that consciously integrates the five biological experiences of women to be considered (menstruation, pregnancy, giving birth, puerperal, and breastfeeding) so as not to get sicker and the five social experiences (stigmatization, marginalization, subordination, violence, and double burden) so that they don't happen at all which has the goal to make a better life for men and women.⁶ She saw the reality that giving birth is not an easy thing. Women as parties who will experience a long reproductive process must get attention to their reproductive rights. Based on the pillars of marriage in Islam, the decision of having children - being childfree can be made if both husband and wife want it and no one feels burdened by each other.

In addition, the experience of the marginalization that had occurred between the roles of men and women in the organization's leadership she was previously involved in, and her interest in gender and women's issues made her very sensitive to the negative views, narratives and harmful traditions against women, Nur Rofiah does not put “having children” as the main purpose of marriage, because she understands that not all women have the ability to pregnant. Also, although there are many narratives explaining that women have a womb to give birth, actually women also have a mind to think, a body to move, and ideas to build civilization. So the utilization of all these organs is an option (*ikhthiyar*) based on wisdom and *ridho* to spread the benefits as widely as possible as vicerent on earth (*Khalifah fil ardhi*).⁶

Conclusion

After discussing the perspective of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah about childfree, it can be concluded that al-Ghazali didn't discuss childfree specifically, but looking at his statement about the purpose of marriage, this article concludes that the decision of childfree is leaving virtues (*tarku al-afdhal*), and if it was chosen because of selfishness or for having fun, childfree is *makruh*. On the other, according to Nur Rofiah being childfree is permissible (*mubah*), but it must be based on wise reason and be approved by both parties. She emphasizes that being childfree does not eliminate the social responsibilities to neglected children, orphans, disabilities, child laborers, victims of domestic violence and pedophilia, also children in conflict areas.

There are some similarities and differences between al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah's perspectives on childfree. Both al-Ghazali and Nur Rofiah explain the virtues and

⁶ Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Uluhuddin: Menghidupkan Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 1122.

⁶ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 56.

⁶ Ngaji KGI, “Hamil, Persalinan, dan Nifas Perspektif Islam,” August 12, 2021, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKjROIYACYq/>.

⁶ Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah*, 40 & 189.

problems of having children, they agree that there is no prohibition on being childfree. They strongly emphasize that both husband and wife must fulfill the rights of their partners to get peace of soul. The differences are, al-Ghazali as a male and classical Islamic scholar emphasized the male leadership. He taught how men lead the family well. Meanwhile, Nur Rofiah as a female and contemporary Islamic scholar emphasized the balance-gender leadership. She prioritizes the condition of women in deciding childfree as a person who will get the long impact of pregnancy. Al-Ghazali prioritizes the division of labor between husband and wife in the public and domestic sector and likens someone who has organs to reproduce as a servant who is given seeds, field and agricultural equipment from his master which should be used as well as possible. Meanwhile, Nur Rofiah prioritizes the equal sharing of responsibilities and women's freedom doing their roles whether contributing in the public/domestic sphere, being a mother/ career woman or with/without children as long as remains responsible for neglected children and social roles. According to her, having a reproductive organ, the ability to conceive and breastfeed is a natural condition (*qudrat*), and using it is an option (*ikhtiar*).

According to al-Ghazali, the basis of children's existence as the main purpose of marriage is the hadith of *Rasulullah* who calls on his friends to get married and have children. The Prophet also strongly recommends someone marry a loving and fertile woman to get many children. Unlike Nur Rofiah, she discusses that the main purpose of marriage is written in Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21 which states that Allah has decreed marriage to find tranquillity, affection and mercy to make a better world as *Khalifah fi al-ardh*.

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