

Research Article

Reinterpretation of the Qur'anic Verses on Parenting Responsibilities

(A Contextual-Reflective Interpretation Study Application of Abdullah Saeed's Approach on Qs. An-Nisa' [4]:9 in the Childfree Phenomenon)

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Abstract: This study aims to: 1) describe the classical interpretation of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:9, particularly the concept of protecting descendants (khaufu 'ala al-dzurriyah); 2) explain the moral message of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:9 regarding parental responsibility through Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutical framework; 3) demonstrate how a reinterpretation of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:9 can provide a new, more positive, and more balanced perspective on the childfree phenomenon in contemporary society. This research adopts a qualitative method grounded in library research. The data sources include classical and contemporary tafsir works, the writings of Abdullah Saeed, thematic literature on family studies, and academic references discussing the modern emergence of the childfree phenomenon. The analysis applies a contextual hermeneutical approach that emphasizes reading the Qur'anic verse through its historical setting, universal moral values, and relevance to contemporary social realities. This approach enables an integrated understanding between the fundamental message of the verse and present-day ethical challenges. The findings reveal that classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:9 focuses on the protection of orphans and the obligation to prevent descendants from falling into states of weakness. The moral message of the verse, viewed through Abdullah Saeed's framework, directs attention to the heavy moral responsibility of raising children, which requires comprehensive readiness. The reinterpretation of the verse highlights that the childfree choice does not inherently conflict with Islamic values, as this decision may arise from moral responsibility to avoid producing descendants who may be at risk of weakness, as warned in the verse. This perspective encourages society to view childfree choices more positively and aligns them with the Qur'anic objective of safeguarding the well-being and strength of future generations.

Keywords: Abdullah Saeed; An-Nisa' [4]:9; Childfree; Contextual Hermeneutics; Protection of Descendants.

1. Introduction

The Qur'an is the divine word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a universal guide for all mankind across time and space. Its teachings not only regulate the dimensions of religious rituals but also provide ethical and social guidance relevant to the ever-evolving dynamics of human life. The uniqueness of the Qur'an lies in the transhistorical nature of its teachings, allowing for continued study and interpretation in line with the challenges of the times without losing its fundamental meaning. Various contemporary social issues demand a more reflective and contextual reading of the Qur'an. The process of *istinbāḥ* of law from Qur'anic verses cannot be separated from the surrounding social reality, especially issues of *ijtihād*. The phenomenon of changing family structures, shifting marriage values, and the dynamics of gender roles are real challenges that require a scientific response based on Islamic normative sources.

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One of the emerging issues of this century is the phenomenon of declining birth rates and the increasing number of married couples deciding to delay or even refuse to have children. Demographic data shows that the fertility rate in Indonesia has decreased significantly from 3.10 in 1990 to around 2.1 in 2020. This condition reflects a shift in society's perspective on marriage, family, and parenting responsibilities. Marriage is normatively understood as a legal bond that gives rise to rights and obligations between husband and wife, including the hope of having children. Current social realities show that not all couples make having children the primary goal of marriage. Some couples choose to live a childless household, known as *childfree*. This decision is generally based on personal considerations such as psychological readiness, economic conditions, concerns about the child's future, and awareness of the significant responsibility of parenting.

childfree lifestyle is often perceived negatively and considered contrary to social norms and religious teachings. This rejection is often reinforced by religious arguments that emphasize marriage as a pathway to the birth of offspring, as implied in QS. an-Nah 1 [16]:72. This verse is understood as affirming the ideality of having children as part of the sunnatullah and the continuity of human generations. Concerns about the sustenance of children are often used as a justification for rejecting *childfree* practices, even though the Qur'an emphasizes that Allah guarantees the sustenance of all His creatures.

childfree discourse has become increasingly prominent in Indonesia following statements by public figures such as Gita Savitri, who openly declared her choice not to have children. This statement sparked widespread debate in the public sphere, from both religious, social, and legal perspectives. A number of academics and legal experts argue that *childfree* is a personal right that is not considered a prohibited act under positive law, although it continues to cause controversy at the religious normative level. The stigmatization of *childfree couples* shows a tendency towards moral judgments that often ignore the context and personal reasons behind the decision. The Qur'an itself pays serious attention to the issue of generational responsibility through QS. an-Nisā' [4]:9, which emphasizes the concern of leaving offspring in a weak state. This verse not only speaks of the obligation to care for children who have been born, but also contains an ethical message regarding the weight of the responsibility of parenting.

Quraish Shihab's interpretation emphasizes that the verse depicts a person's moral anxiety regarding the future of the children left behind, both in terms of economics, education, and social protection. This awareness of responsibility opens up the scope for understanding that the decision not to have children can be understood as a form of moral caution so as not to give birth to a generation whose rights are neglected. A contextual and reflective interpretation approach allows QS. an-Nisā' [4]:9 to be read more comprehensively according to contemporary social realities. Contextual interpretation takes into account changes in time and social conditions, while reflective interpretation emphasizes the ethical dimension and moral awareness of the interpreter. This perspective opens up the scope for understanding that *childfree* does not always stem from an attitude of egoism or rejection of religious values, but can be understood as an expression of responsibility and trust when someone feels they have not or are unable to fulfill the basic rights of a child.

Studies of Qur'anic interpretation that specifically address the phenomenon of *childfree* are still relatively limited and generally focus on normative legal aspects. A Qur'anic ethical approach that places parenting responsibility at the center of discussion has not been widely developed. Therefore, this research is important to present an alternative reading of QS. an-Nisā' [4]:9 that is not only faithful to the text but also responsive to the moral challenges of contemporary Muslims in a wiser and more civilized manner.

2. Method Study

This research methodology uses a qualitative paradigm based on library research *which* aims to explore the meaning, values, and ethical messages of the Qur'an through text analysis and relevant scientific literature. The type of research used is descriptive qualitative research, because the focus of the study is directed at understanding and explaining the meaning of QS. an-Nisā' [4]: 9 related to moral responsibility towards future generations. The research data sources consist of primary data in the form of QS. an-Nisā' [4]: 9 and the contextual interpretation framework developed by Abdullah Saeed, while secondary data include classical and contemporary interpretation books, interpretation methodology books, scientific journals, and other written works that discuss the issues of *childfree*, parenting, and family ethics in Islam as supporting analysis.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and text analysis techniques, namely collecting, selecting, critically reading, and recording relevant written sources. Text

analysis focused on identifying the phrase *zurriyyatan dā'irān* in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:9 to uncover the moral message contained therein. Data analysis used content analysis techniques and text interpretation methods through a contextual and reflective interpretation approach. This approach allows the verse to be understood not only at the literal level, but also in social and ethical dimensions, so that it can be used as a conceptual basis for reading the *childfree phenomenon* as an expression of moral responsibility in a particular context.

3. Results Study

a) Parenting

Parenting in classical Islamic perspective is known as *al-ḥ ad ā nah*, which etymologically means embracing, guarding, and protecting. This meaning shows that parenting is not only oriented towards physical care, but also includes emotional closeness and full responsibility for the child as a weak individual in need of protection. Terminologically, Islamic jurisprudence scholars define *al-ḥ ad ā nah* as the obligation to care for and educate a child or individual who is not yet able to care for himself. Wahbah al-Zu ḥ ail ī emphasizes that parenting includes fulfilling basic needs, protection from harm, and psychological and moral care for the child, so that he can grow up healthy and dignified.

Islamic jurisprudence also recognizes the concept of *kafālah* (the obligation to provide for and protect children) as a form of legal and social responsibility in ensuring the sustenance and protection of children. These two concepts emphasize that parenting has both affective and juridical dimensions. The scope of parenting in Islam encompasses physical care, moral and emotional development, spiritual education, and the development of independence until the child reaches the *tamyīz stage*. Scholars such as al-Ghazali and Abu Zahrah view parenting as a divine mandate aimed at safeguarding children's rights and developing a pious, moral, and beneficial generation for society. Parenting, therefore, is understood not simply as a personal choice, but as a moral and religious responsibility that determines the quality of an individual's life and the sustainability of the community.

b) Childfree

The term *childfree* etymologically comes from English, referring to the condition of not having children as a conscious choice. This definition emphasizes that *childfree* is different from the condition of not having children due to biological limitations. The Cambridge Dictionary defines *childfree* as an individual or couple who chooses to live without children. Experts such as Agrillo and Nelini refer to it as voluntary childlessness, namely the absence of children that is voluntary and intentional. Houseknecht adds that *childfree* refers to a permanent life orientation without the desire to have children in the future. The conceptual distinction between *childfree* and *childless* is important, because *childless* refers to an involuntary condition due to medical factors, while *childfree* is directly related to life choices and personal autonomy.

childfree phenomenon has long historical roots, although the term only became popular in the late 20th century. In the history of Western thought, views questioning reproduction have emerged since the Manichaean tradition and early Christian thought, which viewed pregnancy as necessary to be controlled. Rachel Christil notes that *childfree* individuals have been present throughout history, whether by choice or through specific social conditions. In the 20th century, this phenomenon intensified with changes in family values, increased education and female labor participation, and the transformation of urban culture. The term *childfree* began to be widely used in 1972 through the National Organization for Non-Parents movement in the United States, then developed into part of a global social discourse challenging the culture of pronatalism.

Socio-psychological motives are a dominant factor in *childfree decisions*. Traumatic childhood experiences, dysfunctional parenting styles, and unhealthy family relationships often shape negative perceptions of parenthood. Furthermore, many individuals feel emotionally, mentally, or physically unprepared for the responsibilities of parenting. Concerns about their children's future quality of life, the complexity of social issues, and the high demands of parenting contribute to these decisions. Socially, the pressure of traditional family norms actually encourages some individuals to resist pronatalist values. A study by Morison and colleagues shows that although *childfree couples* often face social stigma, they construct identity and legitimacy for their life choices through community networks and alternative discourse spaces.

c) Interpretation of QS.An-Nisa' [4]:9

QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 is consistently understood by commentators as an ethical warning to protect the weak generation. Classical interpretations place this verse in the context of inheritance management and trusts for orphans. The meaning of *kehauf* is understood as an

empathetic urge to act justly towards other people's children as one desires protection for one's own. The main emphasis is on the fairness of wealth distribution, social trusts, and the necessity of speaking and acting honestly when arranging a will.

The results of modern exegetical studies show an expansion of the verse's meaning toward a more comprehensive social ethics. The subject of the command is not limited to individuals nearing death, but rather encompasses social trustees more broadly. The concept of *zurriyyatan ḍ i 'ā fā* is expanded to encompass economic, educational, moral, and psychological weaknesses. *Qaulan sadīdan* is understood as a principle of ethical communication that protects the dignity and psychological well-being of vulnerable generations. This shift emphasizes the verse's orientation toward intergenerational protection and its rejection of individualism.

A key finding of this research demonstrates a discursive void regarding the issue of childfree in both classical and modern interpretations. All interpretations presuppose the existence of offspring as subjects of protection, not as objects of reproductive choice. The verse contains neither explicit nor implicit discussion of the voluntary decision not to have children. The focus of the verse is entirely on the quality of responsibility towards the existing generation.

A contextual-reflective reading confirms that QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 contains moral principles relevant to assessing the motives and social consequences of modern life choices. The verse's core values of empathy, trustworthiness, and generational justice can be used as an ethical framework to assess the childfree phenomenon without drawing normative conclusions directly from the text. This finding positions the verse as the foundation of an ethics of responsibility, not an instruction for procreation. This shows that QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 can function as a reference for the ethics of generational protection. Its contemporary relevance lies in affirming moral responsibility for the welfare of children and future generations, as well as the need for a contextual hermeneutic approach to bridge the text and modern social reality.

4. Discussion

Classical interpretations of QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 consistently emphasize concern for the birth of a weak generation (*zurriyyatan ḍ i 'ā fan*) as the basis of social ethics. Classical commentators understand this verse as a warning for adults not to leave children without protection, education, and welfare guarantees. This emphasis shows that the core message of the verse does not stop at the biological aspect of heredity, but leads to a moral obligation to ensure the quality of life of the next generation. This finding indicates that the existence of children is always positioned as a trust that demands readiness and responsibility, not just a symbol of family success.

Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach broadens the meaning of this verse to a universal ethical principle. QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 is understood as a guideline for moral decision-making that considers the long-term impact on vulnerable groups. The values of piety and *qawlan sadīdan* serve as a reflective ethical framework, demanding moral honesty and caution in every life choice that has social implications. This approach shows that the verse does not only speak about a specific historical situation, but also offers normative principles that can be applied to modern social contexts, including life choices related to reproduction. The childfree phenomenon, as shown by the results of the literature review, arises from various social and psychological motives, such as traumatic childhood experiences, concerns about the inability to carry out parenting, and resistance to the pressure of pronatalist norms. When this phenomenon is read through the ethical framework of QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9, it appears that the main problem lies not in the rejection of the presence of children, but in the awareness of the great responsibility inherent in parenting. The childfree choice can be understood as a form of moral reflection when individuals or couples feel they are not yet capable of ensuring the protection, welfare, and development of children properly.

This reinterpretation positions childfree as an ethical issue of parenting, not merely a deviation from social or religious norms. QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9 provides moral legitimacy that preventing the birth of a weak generation is part of social and spiritual responsibility. This perspective enriches contemporary Islamic discourse because it emphasizes that the teachings of the Qur'an not only emphasize the ideal of the family, but also the quality of responsibility that accompanies it. This chapter emphasizes that the main values offered by the Qur'an are justice, protection, and the welfare of generations, so that every life choice, including childfree, must be assessed based on ethical considerations and its moral impact.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study confirms that QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9, both through classical interpretation and Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutic approach, contains an ethical message that places the responsibility of parenting as the core of the teaching, not the absolute obligation to have children. Classical commentators understand this verse as a moral warning for parents and guardians not to leave generations in a weak condition, so that the quality of physical, mental, economic, and spiritual protection becomes the main focus. The contextual approach expands this meaning towards the universal value of comprehensive readiness in carrying out the mandate of parenting and fulfilling children's rights comprehensively. Based on this value framework, the choice of childfree in the context of modern society can be reinterpreted as an attitude of ethical responsibility and moral caution when individuals or couples are aware of their limited capacity to carry out proper parenting. This interpretation is in line with the warning of the Qur'an that humans not give birth to weak generations and encourages a more proportional, just view, and is oriented towards the protection and welfare of generations as the core message of QS. an-Nisa' [4]:9.

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