

# The Childfree Phenomenon and the Decline in Fertility : A Public Policy and Islamic Law Perspective in South Korea and Indonesia

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Article	Abstract
<b>Article History :</b> Received : Oct., 11, 2025 Reviewed: Oct., 29, 2025 Accepted : Dec., 1, 2025 Published : Dec., 12, 2025	Phenomenon decline level birth and more popularity style life without child (childfree) has become global issues that affect structure demographics , including in South Korea and Indonesia. Research This aim For identify factors that cause decline number fertility , tracing background behind social from choice childfree living , as well as compare response policy public both countries against challenge mentioned . The method used is studies library with approach analysis descriptive-comparative on demographic data , literature scientific , and documents policy official . Study results show that South Korea is experiencing decline sharp in The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) figure reached 0.78 children per woman in 2022. The decline This affected by pressure economy , domination culture patriarchy , and gender inequality . On the other hand , Indonesia recorded decrease in TFR from 2.6 to 2.4, along with with emergence childfree trend among generation young urban areas . In response to issue This , South Korea adopted pro-natalist policies such as giving subsidies and support for family young , while Indonesia remains focus on control programs population through Family Planning . From the angle view Islamic law , the childfree option raises debate between right individuals and goals wedding in guard sustainability descendants ( hifz al- nasl ).
<b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Fertility, Childfree, Public Policy, Islamic Law, South Korea, Indonesia</i>	

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of declining fertility and the increasing *childfree phenomenon* has become an increasingly complex global issue in the last two decades in developed countries and South Korea is one of them. (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). Based on data from the Total Fertility Rate/TFR, South Korea reached 0.78 children per woman in 2022, while the latest data from South Korean statistics shows that in 2023 the figure will decline again to 0.65 children per woman making it one of the countries with the lowest birth rates in the world . (Cho, 2021; K. H. Choi & Qian, 2023; Nuraini, 2024) This makes South Korea face a demographic crisis due to a sharp decline in fertility rates since the end of the 20th century, with the total fertility rate declining from 1.74 in 1984 to 0.84 in 2020.

Therefore, the population in South Korea is expected to decline from 49.9 million in 2020 to 42.3 million in 2050, along with the acceleration of the transition to an aging society ( *super-aging-society* ) (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023; OECD, 2019). The decline in the birth rate or fertility phenomenon is because women experience difficulties in balancing work and family, there is an imbalance in workload responsibilities, and the influence of Confucian patriarchal culture to this day (OECD, 2019). Although the government has developed maternity and parental leave policies since the early 2000s, the level of implementation is still low.

The phenomenon of fertility is one of the factors that plays a role in changes in population growth (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023). Fertility is not only the biological

potential to reproduce, but also as a part of the number of live births that actually occur in a population group that can be measured through the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) indicator or the average number of children born to a woman during her reproductive period (Bongaarts, 2017; GFMER/WHO, 2018). Meanwhile, *Childfree* is a conscious decision taken by an individual or couple to not have children throughout their life (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). Couples who decide to be *childfree*, they tend to prioritize financial freedom, emotional stability, and prioritize life satisfaction compared to the responsibility of raising children. (Bongaarts, 2017; GFMER/WHO, 2018).

On the other hand, Indonesia is facing a different problem, namely the baby boom. (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023). Based on census data from 2000 - 2010, the population growth rate in Indonesia was higher, namely 1.49 percent per year (BPS). This shows that Indonesia is experiencing an increase even though the population growth rate is decreasing, but the impact is still significant and needs to be considered (BKKBN, 2009). The fertility rate decreased from 2.6 to 2.4 children per woman based on the 2017 SDKI, but this figure has not been able to reach the *replacement rate target* of 2.1 which is the target of the 2015 RPJMN. The data shows that the task of major responsibility for the Indonesian government is birth control.

If the population growth rate remains stable or does not decline, Indonesia is projected to experience a significant population surge in 2045, with a total population reaching around 450 million people, almost double the 2010 figure. This fact reflects the high dynamics of population growth in Indonesia. Factors that can influence the fertility of women of childbearing age in Indonesia, namely, age, education, employment status, wealth level, and contraceptive use have proven to be significant (BKKBN, 2009; Wicaksono & Mahendra, 2016). In Indonesia, the *childfree* phenomenon is starting to develop as a lifestyle choice influenced by economic factors, career, health, and the search for life satisfaction. This choice also contributes to the decline in the community's fertility rate.

(Barakah et al., 2024; Jenuri et al., 2022)

Couples who are about to marry are now considering the *childfree* option even though they are biologically capable of having children. (Jenuri et al., 2022). In terms of well-being, women who choose not to have children report levels of life satisfaction equivalent to those who have children, although they still face pressure from cultural norms and religious values (Barakah et al., 2024; Oktabriyantina, 2025). Globally, the *childfree* decision is associated with the encouragement of personal autonomy, the achievement of life satisfaction, and the socio-economic challenges faced by modern society (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). Meanwhile, (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012) the publication *Choosing to Be Childfree: Research on the Decision Not to Parent* highlights that the *childfree* choice is a result of social construction that grows in modern society, especially in response to changing values regarding family and gender roles.

Both studies emphasize that the *childfree* phenomenon is not solely biological but is part of broader social and cultural changes. However, research simultaneously comparing the *childfree* phenomenon, public policy, and Islamic legal perspectives between two countries with such diverse social characteristics as South Korea and Indonesia remains rare. This gap is crucial to examine, given that the two countries face very different demographic challenges: South Korea is experiencing a serious fertility crisis, while Indonesia faces the potential for significant population growth.

The differences in demographic dynamics between Indonesia and South Korea demonstrate divergent policy directions. Indonesia prioritizes controlling population growth through the implementation of family planning (KB), while South Korea focuses on increasing fertility rates through financial support, providing birth incentives, childcare services, and

strengthening access to reproductive health care (Choi & Qian, 2023; Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023). Although the two countries' approaches differ, both in increasing fertility rates and in responding to the *childfree trend*, they face similar challenges in managing population dynamics and maintaining the community's quality of life. From an Islamic legal perspective, the phenomenon of *childfree* is a contentious issue because it directly relates to the purpose of marriage according to Islamic law.

One of the main goals in *maq'id al-syar'ah* is to maintain the continuity of offspring (*hifz al-nasl*), so that making the decision not to have children throughout life is often seen as contrary to basic principles (Saogi et al., 2025). The *Childfree* phenomenon has become a debate over regulations in society, on the one hand it is considered a form of individual autonomy and rationality, however, on the other hand it is considered not in line with Islamic values which emphasize the importance of offspring and responsibility in the family. Therefore, *Childfree* from an Islamic legal perspective is a multidimensional phenomenon in which there is an element of flexibility in *fiqh* as well as normative limitations in *maq'id al-syar'ah* which reflects the tension between personal choice and religious and cultural values that live in Muslim society.

Previous studies have addressed the trend of declining birth rates and the increasing number of individuals choosing a *childfree* lifestyle. One such study is (Nuraini, 2024) Diah Nuraini's article in FiTUA Vol. 5 No. 2 (2024) entitled "The Decision to Not Marry and Not Have Children in South Korea Among Current Muslim Adoptees," which explores the personal decision not to marry or have children through a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews. Different from these approaches, this study addresses the issue of *childfree* and declining fertility within a broader, comparative framework. Its primary focus is on comparing public policies and Islamic legal views in South Korea and Indonesia.

The methodology used is a literature review with descriptive-comparative analysis, utilizing secondary data from official institutions such as BPS, OECD, and KIHASA, as well as references from classical Islamic legal literature. Rather than exploring individual experiences, this study emphasizes the analysis of state policies, socio-demographic conditions, and the relevance of the *maq'id al-syar'ah* principle in understanding the decline in fertility. With this approach, this study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between public policy directions and Islamic legal perspectives on the phenomenon of *childfree* and declining fertility, while also offering a more comprehensive and integrated academic perspective. Thus, the main focus of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the phenomenon of *childfree* living and declining fertility in South Korea and Indonesia, viewed from the perspectives of public policy and Islamic law.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-comparative method. This type of research was chosen based on the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of social phenomena through analysis of relevant literature, without involving field data collection. The method employed was a literature review, a systematic review of various available scientific publications to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue being studied. (Lewis, 2015; Zed, 2014). The data sources in this study are secondary, obtained from national and international scientific articles accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ. In addition, data was also collected from reports from official institutions such as the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA). Public policy documents such as the Family Planning Program (KB) in Indonesia and the Basic Plan for Low Fertility and Aging Society in South Korea were used to examine the policy direction

of each country. Meanwhile, Islamic legal sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical and contemporary fiqh literature served as the basis for examining the childfree phenomenon from an Islamic perspective.(Zaine, 2023)

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic literature search using keywords such as "childfree," "low fertility," "Indonesian population policy," "South Korean pro-natal policy," and "Islamic views on reproduction." Each source found was then selected based on credibility, relevance to the topic, and year of publication. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-comparative approach. Descriptive analysis aims to explain social phenomena, policy directions, and Islamic legal views related to the issues of fertility and childfree. Meanwhile, comparative analysis was used to identify similarities and differences in policies between Indonesia and South Korea. The analysis stages include literature data reduction, thematic grouping, cross-country comparisons, and drawing conceptual conclusions. With this systematic procedure, the research method can be reapplied by other researchers addressing similar themes to obtain consistent results.(Neuman, 2017).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Declining Fertility and *Childfree* in South Korea and Indonesia

The decline in fertility rates in South Korea poses a major challenge to population growth and national stability. The country has been in the lowest-low fertility category, with a birth rate that plummeted from 1.74 in 1984 to 1.08 in 2005, then dropped again to 0.92 in 2019, and reached a low of 0.65 in 2023. (Kim, 2025; OECD, 2019)Demographic projections estimate that South Korea's population will decrease from 49.9 million in 2020 to around 42.3 million in 2050. This situation does not simply reflect statistical data, but marks a shift towards a super-aging society, where around 40% of the population is projected to be over 65 years old by 2050. (Lee & Choi, 2015; OECD, 2024).It is estimated that 40% of the population will be over 65 years old by 2050. The impact of this condition is a reduction in the productive workforce and an increase in the burden of dependency on the elderly (Cho, 2021; Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023).

The decline in fertility rates in South Korea is influenced by various interrelated factors. Studies show that this trend is primarily driven by structural aspects, such as rising education and housing costs, gender inequality still embedded in patriarchal culture, and shifting family values (Lee & Choi, 2015; Lim, 2021). Furthermore, long work hours and minimal flexibility create a dilemma for career women, who must balance professional demands with domestic life. This situation encourages many women to postpone marriage, and in some cases, choose not to have children or live a childfree lifestyle (Choi & Qian, 2023). Status *externalities* of education create a competition to provide the best education for children, which affects financial burdens, making the *childfree phenomenon* in South Korea an ideal choice to respond to structural social and economic pressures (Kim, 2025). This phenomenon aligns with global trends, as noted by (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012), that millennials and Gen Z tend to prioritize financial freedom and personal happiness over fulfilling traditional family norms.

Unlike South Korea, Indonesia faces a different challenge in responding to declining fertility. While South Korea struggled with declining fertility, Indonesia experienced a population surge in the late 1960s. The prevailing social culture and stigma of "more children means more blessings" contributes to the high fertility rate. The national fertility rate shows a downward trend, according to the Indonesian Demographic and Health Survey (SDKI) published by the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN), although it has not yet reached the population policy target of 2.1 children per woman (BKKBN, 2009). As time goes by, the childfree phenomenon has begun to emerge in Indonesia, although it is still considered taboo due to the strong influence of social, religious, and cultural norms. Unlike



South Korea, the childfree option in Indonesia faces greater resistance due to pressure from religious values and cultural traditions (Barakah et al., 2024; Zuhriah et al., 2023).

Several studies have shown that couples who choose not to have children still report positive levels of life satisfaction. However, this decision is often viewed negatively, considered a deviation from biological nature, and considered inconsistent with religious teachings, so that social stigma is a major barrier to accepting this life choice (Jenuri et al., 2022; Zaine, 2023). This phenomenon is indicative of the "*second demographic transition*" in Indonesia, marked by increasing ages at first marriage, changes in the values of the younger generation, delayed marriage, fewer children, and even the possibility of not having children at all or choosing to be *childfree* (Utomo et al., 2022).

Although a minority, the *childfree phenomenon* in Indonesia shows that the main reasons are economic factors, health, career, and life satisfaction that make the *childfree choice* begin to emerge, especially among young urbanites with higher education. Based on research (Oktabriyantina, 2025), couples who choose not to have children, especially women, show higher levels of participation in the workforce and report levels of life satisfaction comparable to those who have children. This phenomenon indicates that the childfree choice in Indonesia can be seen as a form of adaptation to contemporary socio-economic dynamics, although the level of acceptance in society is still relatively low.

### **The Childfree Phenomenon in a Socio-Cultural Context**

The phenomenon of childfree, the decision by an individual or couple not to have children, has become widely discussed in Indonesian society in recent years. However, from a socio-cultural perspective, this choice remains controversial. This is because religious and cultural norms in Indonesia view children as a gift, a continuation of the family line, and a symbol of family perfection. As a result, those who choose to be childfree often face stigma, social pressure, and even discrimination, both from family and society (Barakah et al., 2024). The childfree phenomenon in Indonesia is closely linked to religious and cultural dimensions. Several studies confirm that Indonesian society views children as a symbol of family continuity and a trust from God.

From a religious perspective, particularly in Islam, offspring are viewed as an essential element inherent in a society's religious and cultural values (Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023). This view is also reflected in social attitudes toward the childfree option, which often draws rejection because it is considered contrary to cultural norms and deeply rooted religious values (Barakah et al., 2024). In the Indonesian socio-cultural context, childfree is often seen as contradicting the teachings of the majority religion, which emphasizes the importance of having children. This view leads most people to view childfree as a deviation from nature or obligation. Research Jenuri et al. (2022) shows that the majority of Generation Z Indonesia disagrees with childfree because it is considered contrary to Islamic teachings. Besides religion, cultural factors also play a significant role. In Indonesian culture, a family is considered complete when there are children, and children are seen as guardians of family harmony and security in old age. Therefore, couples who choose childfree often face questions and social pressure, such as being considered selfish, immature, or rejecting responsibilities as part of society. Conversely, in more individualistic Western cultures, childfree is more readily accepted as a lifestyle choice.

From an Eastern cultural perspective, the family is understood as the primary unit of social structure. Children are positioned not only as part of the family's identity but also as a pillar of social harmony. Therefore, couples who choose to be childfree are often perceived as selfish, immature, or rejecting responsibility. (Afif & Ahwan, 2024) emphasizes that the childfree controversy on social media demonstrates a clash between modern feminist values and Eastern cultural norms that emphasize the importance of family and offspring. On the other

hand, recent research also shows that the younger generation is beginning to question these norms. Jenuri et al. (2022) found that although the majority of Indonesian Generation Z rejects childfree for religious reasons, a small portion actually sees it as a legitimate lifestyle choice within the framework of modernity. This indicates a shift in values, although not yet dominant. Furthermore, cultural anthropology studies show that childfree is also linked to lifestyle discourse. Afif & Ahwan, (2024) highlighted that in digital culture, childfree is often associated with an image of youthfulness and a carefree lifestyle, where childlessness is perceived as providing freedom to maintain personal freedom, career, and appearance. However, this view has again drawn criticism because it is considered contrary to social expectations that place children at the center of the family. Ultimately, the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia's socio-cultural context demonstrates the tension between individual freedom and collective norms. As long as religion and culture continue to position children as symbols of family perfection, the childfree choice will likely remain controversial.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the childfree lifestyle is considered inconsistent with the structure of Indonesian society, which still emphasizes the importance of kinship and lineage. In Javanese, Batak, and Balinese traditions, children are positioned not only as successors to the family but also as crucial elements in maintaining social harmony, continuing customary practices, and ensuring the continuity of the clan or lineage. The presence of children is often interpreted as an indicator of family success and social capital that determines the parents' standing within the community (Barakah et al., 2024a; Jenuri et al., 2022; Zuhriah et al., 2023). Therefore, the childfree decision is considered not merely a personal matter, but also a "rejection" of the collective values deeply embedded in Eastern culture. This situation demonstrates the tension between modern lifestyles that emphasize individual autonomy and traditional values that emphasize social obligations to family and society (Afif & Ahwan, 2024).

Overall, the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia represents a clash between individual freedom and collective norms rooted in religion and culture. As long as children are still seen as symbols of family perfection, the childfree option is likely to remain controversial. However, the growing public discourse on this issue indicates a shift in values within Indonesian society, albeit a minority one.

### **Public Policy in Indonesia and South Korea Regarding Fertility**

Indonesian public policy since the 1970s has focused on fertility control through the Family Planning (FP) Program. This strategy includes providing contraception, increasing the age of marriage, fostering family resilience, and providing outreach, enhanced by innovative mobile family planning services to reach remote areas. (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023) The impact has been significant: population growth has been suppressed, fertility rates have decreased, and the quality of family health and education has improved. With fewer children, family resource allocation has become more optimal, contributing to improved household economic well-being. However, challenges remain, such as unequal access to family planning services and cultural resistance in some communities (Nuraini, 2024). Furthermore, fertility decline has not yet reached the replacement level of 2.1, requiring the government to continually adapt its policy approach to evolving social dynamics.

In contrast, South Korea faces a different challenge: the low fertility trap. Since 2006, the government has launched a pronatal policy through the Basic Plan for Low Fertility and an Aging Society, which includes childcare subsidies, financial incentives for families, expanded maternity and parental leave, and the development of childcare facilities within workplaces. (Lee & Choi, 2015; OECD, 2019). The number of daycares increased from 19,276 in 2000 to 35,352 in 2020, and since 2012, most families have received these services free of charge (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023). This policy temporarily boosted the total fertility rate (TFR)

from 1.08 in 2005 to 1.26 in 2007, but this trend was not sustainable. Evaluations have shown that financial incentives have not been sufficient to overcome structural barriers, such as the dominance of patriarchal culture, long working hours, and the high cost of living in urban areas (Lim, 2021; OECD, 2024).

Over time, South Korea's policy direction has shifted from simply encouraging births to improving the quality of life for young families. The government now places greater emphasis on structural support, such as gender equality in the household and workplace, work flexibility, expanding equal parental leave, and improving the quality of childcare services (Hidayatulloh & Kurniasih, 2023). This approach is expected to be more effective in the long term, although the greatest challenge remains shifting social values and aspirations of the younger generation, which will require time and a profound cultural transformation.

### **Islamic Law's View of *Childfree***

The phenomenon of childfree, the choice of individuals or couples not to have children, is increasingly discussed in contemporary society. The motives vary, ranging from economic reasons and health concerns to personal freedom and psychological considerations. In the context of Muslim societies, this issue has sparked a long debate: whether the decision to reject children is justified according to Islamic law or whether it contradicts the goal of Islamic law, which emphasizes the continuity of generations. Several studies show varying views, with some considering it *makruh* (reprehensible), others permissible under certain conditions, and some even arguing that it contradicts the *maq'id al-shar'ah* (the goals of Islamic law). In academic studies (Fadhilah, 2021a; Habibi et al., 2022), the term childfree refers to the conscious decision not to have children, whether through birth or adoption. This concept is distinguished from childlessness, which is the state of not having children due to biological factors or circumstances beyond the individual's control. From an Islamic legal perspective, more attention is paid to the phenomenon of childfree because it involves a deliberate choice and is directly related to sharia values (Fadhilah, 2021b; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023).

In Islamic legal studies, the primary references related to the issue of childfree often refer to verses of the Qur'an that emphasize children as a gift from God, hadith that place offspring as a form of ongoing charity, and the principle of *maq'id al-shar'ah* that emphasizes the importance of maintaining lineage. From this foundation, two major streams of views emerge: first, having children is seen as part of the objectives of sharia, so the decision not to have children can be considered contrary to basic religious values; second, there is no explicit evidence that requires every couple to have children, so the choice of childfree can be categorized as permissible (Fadhilah, 2021; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023). Research in Indonesia shows three types of opinion. First, a group that considers childfree to be inconsistent with the objectives of sharia because it is considered to hinder the continuity of generations. This choice is even categorized as *makruh*, and in some views, it is almost *haram* if not supported by clear reasons (Fauzi et al., 2025; Ramadhan, 2025a; Saogi et al., 2025). Second, a moderate group that allows childfree as long as the underlying reasons are rational and do not conflict with religious principles. For this group, the command to have children is understood as a recommendation, not an absolute obligation (Fadhilah, 2021; Zaine, 2023). Third, the contextual approach through *maq'id* and *maslahah* emphasizes the importance of looking at real conditions. If childfree is chosen to prevent harm, for example due to hereditary disease or serious health risks, then the decision can be justified (Ramadhan, 2025).

Views opposing childfree are generally based on the belief that one of the primary objectives of sharia is to maintain the continuity of kinship. Furthermore, concerns arise regarding potential social implications, such as weakening family structures, halting the regeneration process, and even a potential demographic crisis that could impact the resilience of Muslim communities (Fauzi et al., 2025; Ramadhan, 2025; Saogi et al., 2025). Conversely,

views supporting the permissibility of childfree emphasize the individual rights of married couples to manage their families, as long as they do not violate fundamental religious principles. This decision can also be understood as part of an effort to achieve public welfare, for example, when a pregnancy is high-risk for the wife or when there is a threat of a serious genetic disease (Fadhilah, 2021). In the realm of family law, the decision to live a childfree lifestyle can have a number of consequences, such as the existence of a prenuptial agreement agreeing not to have children or inheritance issues when there are no direct descendants.

Islamic legal studies in Indonesia emphasize the importance of contemporary *ijtihad* (intelligence) so that positive regulations and religious fatwas can respond proportionally to this phenomenon. Research findings indicate that ulama's views on childfree remain diverse: some reject it as contrary to the principle of maintaining lineage, while others allow for leniency as long as there is a justifiable reason. This discourse continues to evolve and requires ongoing dialogue between academics, religious leaders, and the community to ensure a more contextual approach to Islamic law within modern social dynamics. (Fadhilah, 2021; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023).

### **Comparative Analysis: *Childfree* , Fertility, and the Implications of Islamic Policy and Law in Indonesia and South Korea**

The childfree phenomenon has now become an issue that is not only personal, but also closely related to fertility dynamics, state policy directions, and social and religious norms. In sociological studies, the choice not to have children can be explained through Giddens' (1991) theory of reflexive modernity, which emphasizes that modern individuals increasingly prioritize autonomy and rationality in life decision-making, including in reproductive aspects. This view aligns with Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) ideas regarding the individualization of the family, which indicate a shift from the collective function of the family to personal, choice-based decisions. In Indonesia, the decision to live a childfree life is often considered controversial because it conflicts with social values and religious teachings that emphasize the importance of having children. In Islam, preserving offspring is one of the primary goals of marriage (*maq id al-syar 'ah*). However, Islamic jurisprudence studies show that although having children is highly encouraged, there is no explicit prohibition against childfree choices. Practices such as *'azl* (prevention of pregnancy) have long been discussed in classical Islamic jurisprudence and are considered permissible as long as there is mutual agreement between the couple and they do not cause harm. In the perspective of contemporary Islamic law, the choice to live childfree can be categorized as a *makruh* matter which is not recommended but is not completely prohibited if the decision is taken through deliberation and considering the benefit of the family (Fadhilah, 2021; Fauzi et al., 2025; Ramadhan, 2025; Saogi et al., 2025).

In contrast, in South Korea, the childfree phenomenon is more influenced by structural and economic factors. The high cost of living, rising housing prices, and pressures from the workforce have led to a decline in interest in marriage and reproduction. National policy and evaluation data show that South Korea's fertility rate has fallen into the lowest-low fertility category and has continued to decline over the past two decades (Kim, 2025; OECD, 2019, 2024). This trend aligns with analyses that emphasize that urbanization, economic burdens, and gender inequality are the main factors contributing to the country's low birth rate. (Lee & Choi, 2015; Lim, 2021).

In response, the South Korean government shifted its policy focus from population control to pro-natalist policies, such as providing birth subsidies, tax incentives, and improving childcare services (OECD, 2024b). Indonesia itself is still in the middle demographic transition phase, with a fertility rate of around 2.13 children per woman (Bank, 2023). Although relatively stable, a downward trend in fertility is beginning to emerge among urban populations, as women's education levels and participation in the workforce increase. These findings align with studies (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012), which shows that women with higher education and



economic independence tend to reject traditional reproductive roles and prefer self-fulfillment over social pressure to have children.

Conceptually, the main difference between Indonesia and South Korea in viewing the childfree phenomenon lies in the social structures and norms that frame this choice. In Indonesia, social norms, cultural values, and religious teachings play a significant role in limiting the legitimacy of childfree, often deeming this decision contrary to family values and religious obligations (Barakah et al., 2024; Jenuri et al., 2022; Zuhriah et al., 2023). In contrast, in South Korea, economic factors and work culture are the main determinants, with the high cost of living, work pressures, and gender inequality contributing significantly to the declining interest in marriage and having children (Kim, 2025; Lee & Choi, 2015; Lim, 2021; OECD, 2019).

This analysis emphasizes that effective population policies cannot rely solely on economic incentives but must be accompanied by changes in social values, strengthened support for gender equality, and improved work-life balance to achieve sustainable impact (Lim, 2021; OECD, 2024). Thus, the childfree phenomenon in both countries reflects a complex interaction between culture, economics, and public policy. From an Islamic perspective, this issue demands a contextual approach to the *maq'id al-shar'ah* (obligatory duties of the shari'ah) to accommodate individual rights while maintaining social responsibilities related to the continuation of offspring (Fadhilah, 2021; Ramadhan, 2025a; Saogi et al., 2025). To more systematically demonstrate the differences and similarities between the two countries, a summary is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Comparison of Childfree, Fertility, and Policy Implications in Indonesia and South Korea**

Aspect	Indonesia	South Korea
Fertility	Fertility rate 2.2 (near replacement level, relatively stable)	The fertility rate is 0.72, the lowest in the world, far below replacement level.
Socio-Cultural Views	Children are considered a symbol of family perfection, a guarantor of old age, and part of Eastern norms.(Jenuri et al., 2022)	Individualistic urban culture, career pressures and high costs make childfree more acceptable as a lifestyle choice.(Kim, 2025)
Religious Perspective	In an Islamic perspective , descent viewed as part important from <i>maq'id al- syar' ah</i> . However Thus , the decision For childfree life no necessarily considered haram during there is agreement between couples and considerations to welfare family (Fadhilah, 2021; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023).	In a secular context, religion is not dominant in the childfree discourse, so it is seen more as a personal decision.(Choi & Qian, 2023; Kim, 2025; OECD, 2019)
State Policy	Focusing on population control through family planning, the childfree discourse has not yet become a focus of public policy.(OECD, 2024)	Focus on the fertility crisis: birth subsidies, family allowances, work & gender policy reforms(OECD, 2024)
Implications	Challenges: religious-scientific dialogue, protection of reproductive rights, recognition of childfree as a new social issue.	Challenges: structural reform, balancing work and family, reducing care costs.

Source: Processed from(Choi & Qian, 2023; Fadhilah, 2021; Jenuri et al., 2022; Kim, 2025; OECD, 2019, 2024; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023)

Table 1 shows a sharp contrast between Indonesia and South Korea in their views on the childfree phenomenon. Indonesia faces major challenges in the realm of social and religious norms. The stigma that childfree is synonymous with selfishness or a rejection of nature remains strong, even reinforced by religious views that place children as one of the primary goals of marriage (Jenuri et al., 2022). Therefore, policy implications in Indonesia are more directed at the state's efforts to balance respect for individual reproductive rights with the religious values embraced by the majority of society. Therefore, dialogue is needed between religious scholars, academics, and policymakers so that childfree choices can be positioned proportionally within the framework of Islamic law and national positive law (Fadhilah, 2021; Zaine, 2023; Zuhriah et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, South Korea faces a fundamentally different challenge. With a fertility rate already well below the replacement threshold, the country is in a state of demographic emergency. The government has implemented various pro-natalist policies, ranging from cash benefits and housing subsidies to parental leave. However, numerous studies have shown that financial incentives are ineffective without being accompanied by structural reforms, particularly those related to extreme work culture and gender inequality within households. In this context (Kim, 2025; OECD, 2024), childfree is not seen as a moral issue, but as part of a systemic problem that threatens the sustainability of the state.

A comparison of the two countries confirms that the childfree phenomenon must be understood within its unique socio-cultural context. In Indonesia, childfree is a moral-religious issue that requires a dialogical approach and the protection of reproductive rights. In South Korea, childfree is a structural phenomenon that demands long-term policy reform. Thus, this comparative analysis demonstrates that policy solutions cannot be uniform but must be tailored to the social, cultural, religious, and demographic context of each country.

## CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to comparatively examine the childfree phenomenon and the decline in fertility rates in South Korea and Indonesia through the perspectives of public policy and Islamic law. The analysis shows that fundamental differences between the two countries lie in the causal factors and policy responses to demographic change. In South Korea, the low birth rate is influenced by structural conditions such as the high cost of living, gender inequality in the workforce, and social pressures on women. Therefore, the implemented pro-natalist policies have not been able to significantly address the decline in fertility. Meanwhile, Indonesia faces the challenge of high population growth, although the childfree trend is starting to emerge among educated urban communities as a reflection of changing values and life orientations of the younger generation.

From an Islamic legal perspective, the choice of childfree raises a debate between the principle of preserving offspring (*hifz al-nasl*) within the *maq'id al-syar'ah* and the individual's right to determine the direction of family life. Most scholars view having children as a strong moral recommendation, but not an absolute obligation, as long as the decision does not cause negative impacts and is made based on mutual agreement between the couple. Therefore, childfree needs to be understood as a complex issue, involving demographic, socio-cultural, economic, and religious values. In practice, this study produces several important recommendations for the government and policymakers. A contextual and sensitive approach to population management is needed, including policies that support a balance between work and family life. For Islamic educational institutions, there is a need to strengthen family literacy and the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* that can adapt to social changes, so that Islamic values can be applied inclusively without creating stigma against certain life choices. Meanwhile, for society and religious institutions, it is important to create open and educational dialogue spaces

so that the childfree phenomenon is not merely seen as a moral deviation, but as part of a social dynamic that requires a values-based approach. For future research, a more in-depth exploration of the experiences of Muslim couples who choose childfree and an empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of pro-natalist policies in various countries are recommended. Thus, this study confirms that understanding the phenomenon of childfree and fertility decline requires a comprehensive approach, combining public policy analysis, social theory, and Islamic values, to formulate more inclusive, gender-equitable, and sustainable policies within a demographic context.

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