

THE PHENOMENON OF LIFELONG SINGLES IN INDONESIA: AN ISLAMIC LAW AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH STUDY

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Abstract

The phenomenon of singlehood or remaining unmarried often sparks debates within society, addressing aspects of religion, psychology, and health. The decision not to marry is often viewed as deviating from social norms and generates negative stigma, leading to various issues related to acceptance and its impact on individuals. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to examine this phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Islamic law provides flexibility for individuals to remain unmarried, as long as the decision is based on the intention of piety and worship. Prominent scholars such as Imam Shafi'i and Imam Nawawi assert that living without a spouse is permissible, as long as it remains oriented towards spiritual goals. From a psychological standpoint, the choice to remain unmarried is influenced by factors such as family dynamics, views on independence, and life experiences. This decision may offer benefits, such as career development and personal freedom, but it can also present challenges in the form of social pressure and the risk of loneliness. From a health perspective, marital status is closely linked to both physical and mental well-being. Unmarried individuals tend to face a higher risk of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, yet they are also spared from marital conflicts that may negatively affect psychological well-being. This study concludes that the choice of singlehood can be understood from various viewpoints, while considering the individual's circumstances, intentions, and needs. The contribution of this research is to provide a multidimensional insight into singlehood, which can serve as a reference for policymakers, health practitioners, and society in supporting individuals who choose this path wisely and with respect.

Abstrak

Fenomena hidup melajang atau tidak menikah sering kali menjadi perdebatan di tengah masyarakat, baik dari aspek agama, psikologi, maupun kesehatan. Keputusan untuk tidak menikah sering kali dianggap menyimpang dari norma sosial dan memunculkan stigma negatif, sehingga menimbulkan berbagai persoalan terkait penerimaan dan dampaknya terhadap individu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengkaji fenomena tersebut dari berbagai sudut pandang. Hukum Islam memberikan kelonggaran bagi individu untuk tidak menikah selama keputusan tersebut dilandasi niat ketakwaan dan ibadah. Pendapat ulama terkemuka seperti Imam Syafi'i dan Imam Nawawi menegaskan bahwa hidup tanpa pasangan diperbolehkan, asalkan tetap berorientasi pada tujuan spiritual. Dari sisi psikologis, pilihan untuk tidak menikah dipengaruhi oleh faktor seperti dinamika keluarga, pandangan terhadap kemandirian, dan pengalaman hidup. Keputusan ini dapat memberikan manfaat, seperti pengembangan karier dan kebebasan pribadi, namun juga berpotensi menimbulkan tantangan berupa tekanan sosial dan risiko kesepian. Dalam perspektif kesehatan, status pernikahan menunjukkan hubungan yang erat dengan kondisi fisik dan mental. Individu yang tidak menikah cenderung memiliki risiko lebih tinggi terhadap gangguan mental seperti depresi dan kecemasan, tetapi juga terhindar dari konflik rumah tangga yang dapat memengaruhi kesejahteraan psikologis. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pilihan hidup melajang dapat dipahami melalui

berbagai sudut pandang, dengan tetap memperhatikan kondisi, niat, dan kebutuhan masing-masing individu. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah memberikan wawasan multidimensional mengenai hidup melajang, yang dapat dijadikan acuan oleh pembuat kebijakan, praktisi kesehatan, dan masyarakat dalam mendukung individu yang memilih jalan ini secara bijaksana dan penuh penghormatan.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Islam is a religious commandment that has an important position both in law and in aspects of social life. Marriage is not only a way to fulfill biological needs legally, but also a part of worship, human nature, and the implementation of broad social responsibilities. In Islam, marriage is recommended because it can provide many benefits, such as protecting offspring, restraining lust, creating peace of mind, and helping to form a better society (Aisjah Dachlan, 1969). In the context of Islamic law, the recommendation to marry is addressed to anyone who has fulfilled ba'ah – namely material, physical and mental abilities. This is in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, "O young men, whoever among you is able to get married, then get married, because marriage is more subduing the view and more preserving the genitals" (HR. Bukhari and Muslim). Marriage is an important step in maintaining individual balance both spiritually and socially (Halim, 2008).

Modern reality shows that marriage is no longer considered an obligation by some individuals. In various parts of the world, including Indonesia, more and more people choose not to marry or postpone marriage to a later age. This phenomenon reflects the changing social, economic and cultural values that are developing in society. According to a report by Databoks (2022), the number of recorded marriages in Indonesia continues to decline significantly. In 2022, only 1.7 million marriages were recorded in Indonesia, a decrease of 2.1% from the previous year and the lowest number in the last decade. This trend was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where in 2020 the marriage rate decreased dramatically by 8.96% compared to the previous year. The decline in the number of marriages in Indonesia is not only an indicator of social change, but also shows that more and more individuals are choosing to live celibate lives or postpone marriage, whether for personal, psychological, or economic reasons.

The phenomenon of choosing not to marry – often referred to as "being single" or "celibacy" – is no longer just an individual choice, but also reflects the challenges of modern life. In a normative context (Wulandari, Nursalam, 2015), Islam does not prohibit celibacy as long as the reasons are based on valid intentions, such as focusing on worship or community service. Prominent scholars such as Imam Shafi'i and Imam Nawawi even chose not to marry in order to focus on worship and knowledge (Umasangadji, 2023). This decision demonstrates the flexibility of Islamic law in understanding individual circumstances and the intentions behind the decision (Umasangadji, 2023). On the other hand, the choice not to marry also has significant psychological and health implications. Some studies show that living without a partner can have positive impacts, such as personal freedom, career focus and financial independence. However, there are also negative impacts, such as social pressure, emotional isolation, risk of loneliness, and potential mental health disorders (Adamczyk, 2017).

The study lies in the lack of studies that comprehensively examine the phenomenon of celibacy from two main perspectives: normative and psychological. Most previous studies have focused on just one dimension – either Islamic law or psychology – without exploring the relationship between the two. On the other hand, empirical data related to the physical and mental health impacts of celibacy are also lacking, especially in the context of Indonesian society, which has strong cultural and religious norms regarding marriage. This article aims to examine in depth the phenomenon of celibacy in the perspective of normative Islam and psychology. This research is expected to provide a

more holistic understanding of the decision not to marry, both in terms of conformity with religious teachings and its impact on individual psychological well-being.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with an in-depth and systematic literature review approach. The main focus of the research is on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of relevant data to understand the phenomenon of lifelong singlehood from the perspectives of Islamic law, psychology, and health. The normative approach within the framework of Islamic law is conducted by analyzing verses of the Qur'an, hadith, as well as classical and contemporary fiqh literature using content analysis methods. This approach aims to identify Islamic views on the status of singlehood, the virtues of marriage, and the normative impacts of the decision not to marry on individuals. The study also explores the relationship between Islamic legal principles and the socio-cultural context that influences legal interpretations, thereby producing an analysis that is relevant to the dynamics of modern life. The psychological approach is carried out through a systematic review of psychological literature, including empirical studies that address the emotional, social, and mental impacts of being single. This research applies psychological theories such as self-determination theory and the need for affiliation to explain the factors influencing individuals' decision to remain unmarried. The health approach is conducted by reviewing empirical research in health journals that discusses the physiological and psychological impacts of long-term singlehood, such as the risks of stress, anxiety, and depression. The empirical data is analyzed to identify the relationship between marital status and individual health quality. Through this multidisciplinary approach, the study aims to make a significant contribution to academic understanding of lifelong singlehood in various dimensions, as well as its relevance to the development of knowledge and social policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Lifelong Singlehood from a Normative Perspective

The term "singlehood" refers to someone who chooses not to marry and decides not to engage in marriage. In Arabic, this term is known as "tabattul," which means breaking away from marriage, staying away from relationships, not socializing, and avoiding sexual relations for the sake of freedom and not getting married. According to Imam An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him), celibacy is defined as abstaining from women and not marrying in order to worship Allah more (Al-Dahhak et al., 1431). The prohibition in this first hadith cannot be used as a basis for criticizing a person who chooses to live a celibate life or not get married, unless he abandons marriage on the assumption that celibacy is a form of worship to Allah and is better than marriage. In this case, the hadeeth applies to him, and he is one of those whom the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) shunned.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) explains in Fathul Bari that the meaning of "sunnah" is method or precept, not something that contradicts an obligation (fard). When it is said that a person dislikes something, it means that he turns away from it. Thus, the meaning of the prophet's words is that whoever abandons the teachings of the Prophet and chooses another path, then he is not among the Prophet. Ibn Hajar also refers to the teachings of the rabbinate, where some people make severe rules, as Allah mentions and berates them for their inconsistency in fulfilling their promises. Some of the teachings of the Prophet (SAW) are pure and lenient; he taught breaking the fast in order to strengthen the fast, sleeping in preparation for worship at night, and encouraged his people to marry in order to control lust, preserve honor, and multiply offspring. The phrase "not of my group" means that if someone dislikes something due to misinterpretation caused by ignorance, then this attitude is not in line with the path of the Prophet. In this context, it does not mean that the person has left the religion. However, if the dislike arises from an attitude of resistance and stubbornness that triggers an unwillingness to follow the teachings, then the meaning of "not from my group" is 'not

included in my religion'. This belief is a form of disbelief. This Hadith indicates the importance of marriage and encourages people to do so.

Thus, as explained (Hadith About Celibacy Being All Illegal, N.D.) it can be understood that this Hadith does not absolutely condemn celibacy. This is especially true if there are certain reasons, such as lack of desire for marriage, poor health, or other reasons. So, how can the Shari'ah condemn someone who does not deserve to be condemned, including one who is destined to be unable to unite with his life partner? An explanation of the second hadith can be found in the Encyclopedia of Jurisprudence published by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Religious Affairs, in juz eight p. 13. In the context of language, tabattul means to cut off. Meanwhile, a person who isolates himself with the intention of worship is called Al Mutabattil. In the book Subulus Salam by Ash Shan'ani, tabattul is defined as a refusal to marry because he chooses to focus on worshipping Allah (Muhammad bin Isma'il Al Amir Ash Shan'ani, 1432).

The Prophet SAW prohibited celibacy because there was a friend who forbade something that had actually been allowed by Allah SWT, not because of his own desire to live without a partner. Once upon a time, Imam Shafi'i, a great scholar who lived from 150 H to 204 Hijri, was once visited and asked about the law of celibacy. He replied that it was permissible. When asked about the evidence and whether the Prophet SAW had never said, "Marriage is my sunnah; whoever rejects my sunnah is not part of my people," Imam Shafi'i then explained his answer by quoting Surah Ali Imran verse 39. Imam Shafi'i quotes the verse that reads: Wa Sayyidaw wa Hashuraw wa Nabiyyam minasshoolihin, which means, "(Prophet Yahya AS) became a role model, a personality who was able to restrain himself from indulging in lust, and a Prophet who belonged to the descendants of the righteous." Allah Ta'ala raised the status of some of His righteous servants, and some of them have the title Al – Hashur, those who choose not to marry. This shows that as long as it does not detract from piety, not marrying is permissible. It is known in Islam that Prophet Jesus and Prophet Yahya lived their lives without marrying, also known as Al – Hashur, which means abstaining from lust.

Imam Shafi'i, an absolute mujtahid and founder of the Shafi'i Madhab, died in 204 H. About 430 years later, a man named Abu Zakaria Muhyidin ibn Sharof An – Nawawi Ad – Dimashki, known as Imam An Nawawi, a prominent scholar in the Shafi'i Madhhab, was born. He was born in the village of Nawa, close to Damascus, Syria, in 631 A.H. and died on 24 Rajab 676 A.H. Imam Nawawi was a major mufti of the Shafi'i Madhhab with a deep mastery of various fields of knowledge, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh. Throughout his life, he did not marry and died at the age of 45. But did this choice mean that he was against the hadith "An Nikahu Sunnati"? When tracing the biographies of some of the early scholars, we find that some of them chose not to marry or live in celibacy until the end of their lives. For example, we have Imam ath – Thobari, Abu Bakr Al – Ambary, and Imam An Nawawi. Among women, there were figures such as Khodijah bint Abdus Salam Sahnun ibn Sa'id and robi'ah Al – Adawiyah. Can we conclude from this choice that they were not part of the group that followed the Prophet, while they were famous scholars who mastered and were active in writing or explaining the hadith collections? The truth is that marriage is not obligatory. The basic ruling is sunnah.

The ruling on marriage can change to *ijab*, *karoha*, or even *tahrim* depending on individual circumstances. The hadith "An Nikahu sunnati" implies that marriage is a lifestyle favored by the Prophet. For someone who lives in affluence, marriage is highly recommended. Meanwhile, those who choose celibacy are not to disparage the sunnah of marriage, but to focus on worship and devotion, such as praying, writing books, or teaching. As long as there is no risk of committing a sin, those who take this path are not considered to be contradicting the sunnah. This is what Imam An – Nawawi did. Al – Imam An – Nawawi decided to live a single life until the end of his life, filling his days with worship, writing scientific works, teaching knowledge, and reading the Qur'an. The benefits of his dedication are still felt by Muslims today, as almost all Islamic boarding schools study books by Imam Nawawi. Regarding the ruling on marriage, it is tailored to the condition of the individual considering it.

The following are the categories of conditions for those who are celibate: *First*, Celibacy because they have no desire to marry, perhaps due to fitrah, health conditions, or inability to provide for their children, whereas marriage requires the provision of a dowry and maintenance. *Second*, Being celibate because he is busy with worship and religious knowledge, where marriage could potentially distract him from these two things, even though he is financially capable. *Third*, Celibacy when he has the financial means to marry and is not too preoccupied with worship or religious knowledge. There are scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Imam Nawawi who chose not to marry until they died, preoccupied with jihad in the form of knowledge, and their situation fits into the second category. Thus, the choice of celibacy should fit into one of these categories (Al-Khin et al., 1430). We should not let our youth pass us by without any benefit or valuable work, unlike the dedication shown by Imam Nawawi and Ibn Taymiyyah. Only Allah can provide guidance and direction.

b. Lifelong Singles from a Psychological Perspective

According to Hurlock (1980), adulthood marks the beginning of the process of adjusting to new patterns of life and social expectations. At this stage, individuals are expected to take on new roles, such as husband or wife, parent, and breadwinner, and develop attitudes, desires, and values in line with their developmental tasks. Marriage is one of the developmental tasks at the adult stage, where this development means that individuals undergo various progressive changes as a result of the process of maturity and experience. According to Van Den Daele, development encompasses qualitative change, not just height gain or increased ability. Rather, development is a process of integration of various complex structures and functions (Hurlock, 1980). In psychology, marriage has a positive impact on psychological well-being, as couples play a major role in shaping adult identity. Married people will receive social and psychological support from their families. Problems experienced by married people tend to be less harmful to mental health than those experienced by unmarried people. People who have psychological well-being tend to marry, while people with limited psychological well-being tend not to marry and some even divorce after marriage (Lee et al., 2020).

However, in the growing modern era, many individuals choose not to marry as part of their life journey. Not getting married from a psychological perspective can be explained from various perspectives. The trauma of divorce to children can be a reason for choosing the decision to avoid marriage due to the trauma of the case of both parents (Ismiati, 2018). Family experiences during childhood can influence a person's view of marriage. For example, a harmonious and stable family environment tends to make a person have a positive view of marriage, while family experiences full of conflict or divorce can make a person reluctant to get married. Some people may choose not to marry because they feel more comfortable with their independence (Wulandari et al., 2015). Without the commitment of marriage that requires significant time and attention, a person can focus on developing their career. They may have greater flexibility to travel, take on new projects, or pursue exciting professional opportunities. They may have a successful career or have activities and interests that fulfill their needs without the need for dependence on a life partner.

A person's personal experiences, such as previous unsuccessful relationships or emotional trauma associated with marriage, can influence one's decision not to marry (Umasangadji, 2023). Bad experiences or betrayal in previous relationships can lead to a lack of trust in a partner. This can make a person hesitant to get married because they are not sure if they can trust their partner completely. In addition, someone who has experienced unhealthy relationships, heartbreak, or marriage failure in the past. These experiences can make them reluctant to engage in a marriage commitment again for fear of experiencing the same pain. It is important to note that being unmarried is not something that is intrinsically positive or negative from a psychological perspective. Each individual has unique reasons and experiences in choosing their life path, and what matters most is that the decision is in line with their personal needs and values. Not getting married can provide an opportunity to develop independence more independently,

managing one's own life without dependence on a life partner (Wulandari et al., 2015). Focusing on a career or more intensive self–development without considering marital responsibilities can lead to higher achievements in the professional field. Also, by not being married, individuals have greater control over their own financial decisions. They can manage spending, saving, or investing their money without the need to discuss or confer with their partner about joint financial decisions.

The absence of marital commitment can provide personal freedom to live life according to personal desires and interests. Thus, the personal freedom possessed by unmarried individuals can have a positive impact in terms of life organization, self–development, and achievement of personal goals without the limitations that may arise from marital responsibilities. Not having marital responsibilities allows one to make more flexible life choices. They can choose to live where they want, travel without restrictions, without considering the consequences for a spouse. Life changes are a source of stress because the changes that occur force adjustment, stress refers to pressure and demand (Nevid et al., 2018). Unmarried individuals are often faced with questions, comments, or expectations from their social environment regarding why they are not married or whether they have plans to marry in the future.

This social pressure can create feelings of discomfort, interference, or the stress of having to account for their life choices to others. Loneliness is an unpleasant subjective experience that occurs when the quality and quantity of one's social interactions decrease drastically. The impact of this loneliness is that individuals feel isolated and unwanted, even though they are not alone and are in the middle of a crowded environment (Annisa, 2015). In general, feeling connected to others can reduce morbidity and relationship quality is a predictor of physical and psychological well–being (Adamczyk, 2017). Not having a life partner can increase the risk of loneliness because the individual does not have someone emotionally close to share life experiences, stories, or problems faced. The impact of loneliness can affect a person's overall quality of life. The inability to feel emotionally connected to others can reduce happiness and life satisfaction, even if the individual has success in other areas such as career or hobbies.

c. Single or Unmarried in Health Approach

a person's decision to remain single or unmarried has a significant impact on their physical and mental health. Some studies have shown that marriage can have positive effects on health, mainly due to emotional support, improved psychological well–being, and the formation of close social bonds. However, there are also a number of positive and negative effects associated with the choice to remain unmarried, which are worth noting (Adamczyk, 2017). Being unmarried is associated with several mental health risks, such as an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Research shows that individuals living without a partner or the support of an intimate relationship are prone to mental health problems at a higher rate than those who are married. Social support from a partner plays an important role in reducing stress and increasing feelings of connectedness, which are important for mental well–being (Lee et al., 2020). However, being unmarried does not necessarily have a negative impact on everyone. Some individuals can feel freer and more satisfied with living alone, especially if they have a strong social support network or focus on self–development.

The factor of independence and freedom without family responsibilities can provide psychological comfort. In terms of physical health, marriage is associated with improved physical health through lifestyle stability, access to health support, and daily supervision. A study by Lee et al. in Korea showed that individuals who remain unmarried tend to have lower levels of physical health than those who are married, as marriage can improve health habits and lower the risk of certain diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. Conversely, there are also health benefits for people who choose not to marry. Some studies show that those who live alone tend to be more diligent in self–care and more physically active, which can improve the quality of their health. However, in general, the married group still has greater benefits in terms of heart health and reduced risk of degenerative diseases. One of the biggest risks that unmarried individuals face is the

chronic feeling of loneliness, which has been shown to negatively impact quality of life. Loneliness can trigger inflammation and weaken the immune system, thereby increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, and even increasing the risk of premature death. Individuals who do not have a partner tend to lack daily support that can help reduce feelings of loneliness, which is often experienced by people who are single for long periods of time (Annisa, 2015).

Some people who are single or unmarried can reduce the negative effects of loneliness by strengthening other social ties, such as family relationships, close friends, or social communities. A solid social network can be a strong emotional buffer and is effective in reducing feelings of isolation and improving emotional health (Hurlock, 1980). On the other hand, being unmarried can provide some health benefits especially for those who are able to manage stress well. Maintaining an independent life allows some people to avoid the stress that may arise from marital conflict, which has been shown to increase the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol in the body. Thus, some people who are single can have good emotional balance and are free from interpersonal conflicts that are usually more common in marital relationships (Nevid et al., 2018). This explanation provides an understanding that the choice to be single or unmarried has a complex impact on one's health, both mentally and physically. Both marriage and singleness have advantages and disadvantages, which should be tailored to the individual's personal needs and values.

CONCLUSION

Singlehood refers to a person's decision not to marry, to avoid social relationships, and to prioritize the worship of Allah. This view is reflected in the words of Imam An – Nawawi who revealed that being single is to continue to focus on worship. Islam provides flexibility towards marital status, taking into account the condition of the individual and their purpose in life in an act of worship and servitude to Allah SWT. There are traditions that direct Muslims not to be single, with the explanation that the prohibition does not apply to those who maintain piety and perform worship well, not because they think being single is better than getting married. Scholars such as Imam Shafi'i and Imam Nawawi, although not married, are still respected for their dedication to worship, knowledge, and service to the people. The law of marriage is seen as a recommended sunnah, but not obligatory if one's condition and life goals have reached perfection in worship. Being single or unmarried can be understood from various perspectives involving the influence of the family environment, perceptions of independence, and personal experiences.

There are also negative impacts to consider, such as social pressure and the risk of loneliness. Being single is not intrinsically positive or negative from a psychological perspective, but is a life choice that should be in accordance with an individual's personal needs and values. Meanwhile, from a health perspective, being unmarried has implications for physical and mental well-being. While unmarried individuals may be freer from domestic conflicts, they potentially face higher risks of mental disorders and declining physical health over time. The decision to be single or unmarried requires a deep understanding of the individual's circumstances, and the choice can be a positive life path if undertaken with careful consideration. The global community is expected to respect the choices of individuals who choose to be single, understanding that this decision is influenced by various factors, such as beliefs, psychology, and personal preferences. Social stigma against those who are single needs to be reduced through educational campaigns and positive narratives that emphasize lifestyle diversity.

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