

MAINTAINING MARITAL STABILITY AFTER INFIDELITY: A Case Study of Childless Couples from the Perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

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Abstrak

Perselingkuhan merupakan salah satu permasalahan rumah tangga yang paling serius karena dapat memicu konflik dan mengganggu keharmonisan hubungan suami istri. Meskipun demikian, banyak pasangan tetap memilih mempertahankan pernikahannya setelah mengalami pengkhianatan, termasuk pasangan yang belum memiliki anak. Fenomena ini menarik untuk dikaji karena ketiadaan anak seharusnya membuat keputusan untuk berpisah menjadi lebih mudah, namun kenyataannya banyak pasangan tetap memilih bertahan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji faktor-faktor yang melatarbelakangi keputusan tersebut melalui perspektif *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus dan analisis normatif-empiris. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap dua informan yang menjadi korban perselingkuhan, belum memiliki anak, dan memutuskan untuk tetap mempertahankan pernikahannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keputusan bertahan dipengaruhi oleh pertimbangan emosional, sosial, psikologis, dan spiritual yang saling berkaitan. Keputusan tersebut juga menimbulkan dampak yang bersifat ambivalen. Di satu sisi, keharmonisan rumah tangga dan kedekatan emosional mengalami penurunan akibat luka pengkhianatan yang belum sepenuhnya pulih. Di sisi lain, interaksi dan komunikasi justru meningkat karena adanya penyesalan dari pihak yang berselingkuh serta upaya memperbaiki hubungan. Dalam perspektif *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*, keputusan mempertahankan rumah tangga dapat dibenarkan apabila mampu mewujudkan *maṣlahah* melalui penjagaan keturunan (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), penjagaan jiwa (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), dan penjagaan agama (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), serta disertai pertobatan yang tulus, rekonsiliasi, dan upaya nyata untuk membangun kembali hubungan pernikahan.

Kata Kunci: Perselingkuhan, Ketahanan Rumah Tangga, *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*

Abstract

Infidelity is one of the most significant marital problems, often leading to conflict and undermining marital harmony. Nevertheless, many couples choose to preserve their marriage despite experiencing betrayal, including those who have not yet had children. This phenomenon is noteworthy because the absence of children would seemingly make separation less complicated; however, many couples still decide to remain together. This study examines the factors underlying this decision and analyzes them through the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. A qualitative case study design combined with a normative-empirical approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with two participants who had experienced spousal infidelity, had no children, and chose to continue their marriages. The findings reveal that the decision to remain married is shaped by multidimensional emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual considerations. The decision also generates ambivalent consequences. While marital harmony and emotional intimacy decline because of unresolved betrayal, interaction and communication may increase as the unfaithful spouse demonstrates remorse and attempts to restore the relationship. From the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, preserving the marriage is justifiable when it promotes *maṣlahah* by safeguarding progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), psychological well-being (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), and religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), and is accompanied by sincere repentance, reconciliation, and genuine efforts to rebuild the marital relationship.

Keywords: Infidelity, Marital Resilience, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that arises from the union of a man and a woman, within which a commitment is established to maintain fidelity, trust, and harmony. A harmonious household not only provides emotional and sexual satisfaction for the couple but also contributes to the family's economic well-being, thereby supporting the creation of a happier life (Siroj, 2022). In Islamic thought, marriage is not merely a social contract but a sacred bond intended to foster *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion). Yet, social reality demonstrates that not all couples succeed in upholding this commitment. One of the most common violations of marital fidelity is infidelity, which is widely regarded as a breach of moral, social, and religious values. Infidelity undermines trust, destabilizes marital relationships, and directly contradicts the Qur'anic vision of marriage as a source of peace and love (Hadrowi, 2014).

The phenomenon of infidelity in Indonesia has reached alarming proportions. A survey conducted by JustDating revealed that Indonesia ranks second in Asia for infidelity cases, with a prevalence rate of 40% (Valencia, 2023). This figure underscores the magnitude of the issue and its pervasive impact on marital stability. Furthermore, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2024 reported that approximately 38% of divorce cases in Indonesia were caused by infidelity and domestic violence (Rabbani, 2024). These statistics highlight the urgent need to examine infidelity not only as a moral transgression but also as a social problem with far-reaching consequences. Victims of infidelity often experience trauma, depression, anxiety, and a profound loss of trust in themselves and others (Shaleha & Kurniasih, 2021). The repercussions extend beyond the couple, affecting children's psychological well-being and contributing to long-term family instability (Indrawati, 2026).

Despite the well-documented negative consequences of infidelity, some couples choose to remain in their marriages even after discovering their partner's betrayal. One of the primary reasons for this decision is the presence of children, who are often perceived as the binding force in a marriage. Children become the central consideration in the decision not to divorce, as separation can have serious psychological consequences, including the loss of affection, protection, and stability (Hasanah, 2020; Setiawan, 2025). The responsibility of safeguarding children's welfare often outweighs the desire to end a dysfunctional marriage. However, the phenomenon of maintaining a marriage after infidelity is also observed among couples without children. This raises fundamental questions: if children are not the reason, what other factors motivate couples to remain together? What are the consequences of such decisions for the quality of marital relationships, and how does *maqashid shari'ah* interpret this phenomenon?

Islam explicitly prohibits adultery and all forms of behavior leading to it, as stated in the Qur'an: "Do not approach adultery. Indeed, it is an abomination and an evil way" (Q.S. al-Isra [17]: 32). Infidelity falls within this category and is therefore strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, Islam also provides space for reconciliation (*islah*) within marriage, whether through advice, repentance, or efforts to restore the relationship (Q.S. an-Nisa [4]: 128). This duality reflects the balance between upholding moral principles and recognizing the complexities of human relationships. In this context, the *maqashid shari'ah* approach becomes highly relevant, as it does not merely assess prohibitions

and permissions but also considers the benefits and harms of every decision. The choice to maintain or dissolve a marriage after infidelity can be analyzed through the five essential elements of *maqashid shari'ah*: protection of lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), and property (*hifz al-mal*) (Faridah et al., 2025). These principles provide a framework for evaluating whether maintaining a marriage after infidelity serves the greater good or perpetuates harm.

Previous studies have examined infidelity and the decision to maintain marriage from various perspectives. Lestari (2022) explored strategies for preserving marital integrity after infidelity within the framework of Islamic family law, emphasizing the role of legal and religious norms in guiding marital decisions. Syaiful (2022), Rahayu (2019), and Rahmasari (2021) highlighted the importance of forgiveness, marital commitment, and the presence of children as key factors in sustaining marriage. Amiruddin (2021) further emphasized that socio-cultural factors, such as community expectations and family pressure, influence the decision to forgive a partner's unfaithfulness. These findings suggest that the reasons for maintaining marriage after infidelity are generally explained through forgiveness, commitment, social support, and the presence of children. However, research specifically focusing on couples without children remains scarce. This gap is significant, as such cases present unique complexities where the absence of children eliminates one of the most common explanations for staying in the marriage.

The lack of scholarly attention to childless couples who remain in marriages after infidelity represents a clear research gap. Most previous studies concentrated on couples with children, while the phenomenon of maintaining marriage after infidelity among childless couples has received little exploration. Yet, this phenomenon undeniably exists and raises important questions about marital resilience, decision-making, and the role of religious principles in guiding such choices. Understanding the motivations and consequences of these decisions is crucial for developing a more comprehensive perspective on marital dynamics in contemporary society. Moreover, examining this issue through the lens of *maqashid shari'ah* offers valuable insights into how Islamic jurisprudence can address complex family issues in modern contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze the factors underlying the decision to maintain marriage after infidelity among couples without children; (2) examine the consequences of such decisions for marital dynamics; and (3) explore the phenomenon from the perspective of *maqashid shari'ah*. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the discourse on *maqashid shari'ah* in contemporary family issues and practically by providing insights for couples, family counselors, and policymakers in addressing infidelity. By filling this research gap, the study seeks to advance scholarly understanding of marital resilience and provide a nuanced framework for evaluating the interplay between personal choices, social pressures, and religious principles in the context of infidelity.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of couples who chose to preserve their marriage after

experiencing infidelity despite not having children. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on exploring meaning, decision-making processes, and the psychological and religious dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative methods (Pragholapati, 2020). The empirical findings were subsequently analyzed using a normative-empirical approach from the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah*, enabling the participants' subjective experiences to be interpreted within the framework of the fundamental objectives of Islamic law. This approach facilitates the integration of empirical realities observed in the field with normative analysis concerning the dimensions of benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) and harm (*mafsadah*) arising from the phenomenon under investigation (Az-Zahra, 2024).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide designed to provide participants with sufficient flexibility to describe their experiences, the reasons for maintaining their marriage, the process of rebuilding the relationship, and the religious considerations that influenced their decisions. All interviews were conducted with the participants' informed consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analyzed systematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, coding, categorization, and conclusion drawing. Coding was conducted inductively to identify the major themes emerging from the data, including the factors underlying the decision to preserve the marriage, the psychological and relational consequences following infidelity, and the forms of religious considerations that shaped the participants' decision-making processes. These themes were then interpreted comprehensively to identify relationships among categories and to construct a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby individuals were chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study (Etikan, 2016). The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) be victims of infidelity within a marital relationship; (2) have direct knowledge of their spouse's emotional and/or sexual infidelity; (3) have decided to maintain the marriage after the occurrence of infidelity; and (4) have had no children at the time the decision to remain in the marriage was made. Based on these criteria, two participants were recruited because they were able to provide rich and in-depth information relevant to the research objectives. The first participant experienced infidelity after sixteen years of marriage, whereas the second participant encountered infidelity only one month after marriage. The relatively small number of participants reflects the nature of case study research, which prioritizes depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Data collection was concluded once the information obtained demonstrated recurring patterns and reached data saturation.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed, including *member checking*, *peer debriefing*, and the maintenance of an *audit trail*. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to review the interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their intended meanings. Furthermore, the analytical process was discussed with academic peers to minimize

interpretive bias, while all stages of data collection, management, coding, categorization, and analysis were systematically documented as an audit trail to enhance the transparency and dependability of the research process. After the empirical themes had been established, they were interpreted using the *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah* framework by evaluating each finding in terms of its potential benefits (*maṣlaḥah*) and harms (*mafsadah*), and subsequently relating them to the principal objectives of Islamic law, particularly the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Accordingly, the normative analysis was not predetermined at the outset of the study but was applied as a final interpretive stage grounded in the empirical findings, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the decision to maintain a marriage after infidelity among childless couples.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reasons for Maintaining the Marriage

The presence of children is frequently regarded as a primary factor influencing an individual's decision to preserve a marriage despite the occurrence of infidelity (Muntamah & Suryanto, 2023), given that divorce may have serious consequences for children's well-being. Nevertheless, this study found that the decision to remain in a marriage after infidelity also occurs among couples who do not yet have children. The interview findings indicate that this decision is shaped by several interrelated factors that participants considered when deciding to maintain their marital relationship.

a. Support and Advice from the Social Environment

Psychologically, individuals who have experienced a partner's infidelity often undergo emotional instability (Wulandari, 2025). Under such circumstances, support and advice from family members, relatives, and close acquaintances can substantially influence the decision-making process. In the context of preserving a marriage, such advice commonly encourages individuals not to make hasty decisions. Informant 1 (January 2026) stated: *"People kept telling me to wait and not rush into ending the marriage."*

This statement demonstrates that the social environment functions not only as a source of emotional support but also as an important consideration in the post-infidelity decision-making process. Advice urging the informant to avoid making an immediate decision to end the marriage provided an opportunity to stabilize emotional distress before determining the next course of action. At a time when emotions were dominated by disappointment, anger, and emotional pain, support from family members and significant others enabled the informant to evaluate the situation more rationally and consider various possible future outcomes. Consequently, guidance and encouragement from the surrounding social environment emerged as one of the factors influencing the informant's decision to maintain the marriage.

b. Belief in and Hope for a Partner's Change

Although infidelity constitutes a serious breach of trust within marriage, it does not necessarily eliminate optimism regarding the future of the relationship. For some individuals, the belief that their partner is still capable of changing serves as the foundation for granting another

opportunity and preserving the marriage. Informant 2 stated: *"I just keep hoping. I believe that if I give him another chance, one day he will change."* (March 2026). A similar perspective was expressed by Informant 1 regarding hope and confidence in the partner: *"I still have faith that he is a good person and that he will eventually change."* (January 2026)

These findings suggest that as long as there remains a possibility for positive change in the partner, the relationship is still considered worthy of being maintained. The decision to remain in the marriage is closely associated with the psychological mechanism of hope, which functions as a form of emotional resilience, enabling participants to continue their commitment despite the damage inflicted on the relationship. In other words, the decision to preserve the marriage is influenced not only by the current condition of the relationship but also by expectations regarding its future potential.

c. Fear of an Uncertain Future

Divorce is not always perceived as an easy option for married individuals. For some participants, the dissolution of a marriage gives rise to profound uncertainty regarding the life they will face afterward. This concern is reflected in Informant 1's statement: *"Even if I get divorced and remarry, there's no guarantee that I'll find someone better. What if it's actually the same or even worse?"* (January 2026). Such concerns also involve anxiety about the social status that follows divorce and its associated consequences. As expressed by Informant 2: *"If I get divorced, I'll become a widow. What if no one wants to marry me? It's difficult for a widow to find a new partner."* (March 2026)

These findings indicate that the decision to remain in the marriage is not necessarily based on the restoration of the relationship itself. Rather, when the future is perceived as uncertain—with the possibility of experiencing a more difficult life or facing unpredictable social and relational consequences that may result in greater losses—individuals tend to prefer maintaining a familiar situation, even if it is emotionally distressing. Consequently, remaining in the marriage is often regarded as a safer alternative than confronting an uncertain future. This finding is consistent with the concept of status quo bias, which suggests that individuals tend to maintain their current circumstances because of anticipated regret and an aversion to potential losses (Bernecker, 2014).

d. Consideration of the Length of the Marriage

Living together over an extended period fosters emotional attachment and shared routines that make separation a particularly difficult decision. Informant 1 explained: *"Once you're married and living together under the same roof, especially spending every day together, deciding to separate becomes incredibly difficult."* (January 2026). This statement is consistent with Rusbult's Investment Model of Commitment, which posits that the greater the investment of time, effort, and emotional resources in a relationship, the stronger the commitment to maintaining that relationship (Agnew & Arriaga, 2011). Likewise, Informant 2 explained that the relatively short duration of the marriage was one reason for not rushing to end it: *"Our marriage is still new, so I don't want to rush into ending it."* (March 2026)

The findings indicate that the length of a marriage is not merely a matter of chronological duration but also reflects how individuals assign meaning to the value and continuity of their marital relationship. Some participants chose to remain because substantial investments of time and shared

experiences had created deep emotional bonds. Others decided to stay because they believed the marriage was still in its early stages and therefore deserved further effort before considering separation. Accordingly, the decision to remain in the marriage after infidelity is shaped by both retrospective evaluations of past investments and prospective assessments of the relationship's future potential.

e. Concern for the Partner's Well-Being

When making important life decisions, individuals do not necessarily consider only their own interests. As expressed by Informant 1: *"I kept thinking, what will happen to my husband if we get divorced? Where will he go? Who will be with?"* (January 2026). This statement indicates that the informant continued to consider the well-being of the partner who had caused emotional pain, demonstrating the persistence of relational empathy, affective attachment, and a sense of social responsibility. Rather than viewing the partner as someone who deserved punishment, the informant still perceived him as a person who occupied a meaningful place within her emotional world. This reflects the complexity of emotional attachment, where the pain caused by infidelity coexists with genuine concern for the partner's welfare.

f. Consideration for Significant Others

Marital problems are not viewed solely as issues between husband and wife. For many individuals, such problems are also perceived as having far-reaching consequences for the wider family. This perspective is reflected in Informant 2's statement: *"I don't want my parents to keep worrying. They would be deeply hurt and disappointed to know that their child is going through something like this."* (March 2026). Likewise, the condition of the spouse's family also influenced the decision-making process. Informant 1 explained: *"I keep thinking about my parents-in-law. How would they feel if our marriage ended? They wouldn't be the only victims—it's not just about him or me."* (January 2026). This finding is consistent with Gilligan's theory, which argues that women often approach moral decision-making through the lens of relational responsibility, in which preserving the emotional well-being of loved ones becomes a crucial consideration (Gilligan, 1982).

These findings suggest that factors external to the marital relationship also contribute to the decision to remain in the marriage. When confronted with marital crises, participants tended to adopt a relational and care-oriented perspective rather than relying solely on an individual cost-benefit analysis. Within this context, the reluctance to cause emotional pain to parents and parents-in-law served as a psychological restraint that reinforced the decision not to dissolve the marriage.

g. Concerns About Social Stigma

Within Indonesian society, where collectivist cultural values remain deeply embedded (Utama, 2024), divorce is frequently associated with failure, shame, and an inability to preserve marital harmony (Syawaluddin et al., 2024). This perception is reflected in Informant 2's statement: *"What will people say if they find out I'm divorced? I'll be embarrassed in front of my neighbors, relatives, extended family, and even my parents' friends who attended our wedding. They'll talk about me in all kinds of ways."* (March 2026). These findings lead to two important conclusions. First, divorce is perceived not merely as the termination of a personal relationship but also as a social event that may trigger negative judgments

from the surrounding community, thereby affecting one's self-image and social acceptance. Second, within this context, maintaining the marriage can be understood as a strategy for avoiding social disapproval and minimizing the stigma associated with divorce.

h. Continuing to Experience Comfort Within the Relationship

Infidelity does not necessarily erase all of the positive aspects that previously characterized a relationship. The disappointment and emotional pain caused by infidelity may be alleviated by a partner's continuing expressions of affection, care, and emotional support. Informant 1 stated: *"There is still a sense of comfort that makes me want to stay. He still shows me love and cares about me."* (January 2026). The sense of comfort may also originate from the emotional attachment of the betrayed partner. As Informant 2 explained: *"Divorce isn't that simple. He's already my husband. We see each other every day, so of course there's still love. Even after what happened, I still love him."* (March 2026)

This condition may be explained by the concept of emotional dependency, whereby individuals feel incapable of living without their partner because they rely on that person for their happiness and even their sense of self-worth. Consequently, despite experiencing mistreatment or emotional pain, they continue the relationship because they feel unable to let it go (Ma'rufa, 2025).

i. Protecting the Partner's Reputation

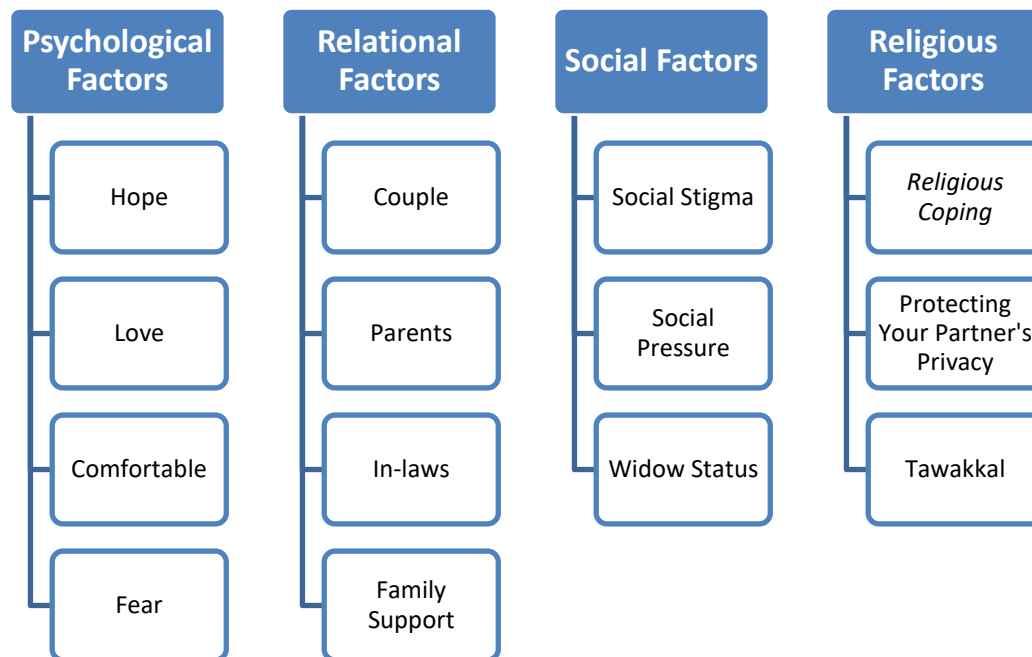
As a state governed by the rule of law, Indonesia clearly regulates the legal procedures for divorce. When a wife files for divorce, Article 39(2) of the Marriage Law and Article 163 of the HIR/Article 283 of the RBg require her to provide legally recognized evidence and valid grounds. As a result, divorce proceedings may expose private marital problems to public scrutiny. This concern is reflected in Informant 1's statement: *"I don't want to expose his disgrace. A wife should protect her husband's honor. If I file for divorce, his affair will become public, and everyone will know about it."* (March 2026)

These findings demonstrate that divorce is also perceived as an action that may reveal a partner's shortcomings to others. Individuals who choose to remain in the marriage often regard the preservation of their partner's dignity as more important than exposing the wrongdoing that has occurred. Consequently, the desire to protect the partner's honor becomes one of the considerations encouraging participants to maintain their marital relationship despite the experience of infidelity.

j. Surrendering Oneself to Allah

When confronted with situations beyond their control, individuals often seek meaning that enables them to accept reality. Infidelity is perceived as one of the trials that must be endured as part of God's divine decree. This perspective is illustrated by Informant 1: *"I choose to accept and live with what has happened. Allah has destined all of this. Let Allah deal with it. I believe Allah is perfectly just, and perhaps this is what is best for me."* (January 2026). This attitude of surrender and acceptance can be understood through the concept of **religious coping**, whereby individuals draw upon spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and their relationship with a higher power to manage stress, trauma, and life's challenges (Margaretha et al., 2024). Rather than perceiving adversity as meaningless suffering, they interpret difficult experiences as part of God's divine wisdom and providence. This spiritual perspective fosters emotional resilience, enabling individuals to cope with painful circumstances without losing hope or purpose. In other words, they entrust the outcome of their difficulties to God while

continuing to fulfill their responsibilities and live their lives with faith, patience, and perseverance (Ikhwanisifa, 2022).



2. The Impact on the Dynamics of the Marital Relationship

The continuation of a marriage following infidelity does not necessarily signify the restoration of the relationship to its pre-infidelity condition. Rather, the decision to remain together often carries significant consequences for both the relationship itself and the couple's everyday interactions. These consequences arise not only from the experience of infidelity but also from the decision to continue the relationship despite the emotional damage it has sustained. This reality is reflected in Informant 1's statement (January 2026), who explained that after deciding to remain in the marriage, feelings of affection toward the spouse had diminished and were no longer the same as before. A similar experience was described by Informant 2 (March 2026): *"The relationship feels empty now. It's no longer as harmonious as it used to be, and I've become more indifferent toward him."*

These findings indicate that the decision to preserve the marriage does not automatically restore the quality of the marital relationship. Although the marriage continues in a formal sense, the emotional quality of the relationship is substantially reduced. Consequently, remaining together represents the continuation of the marital institution rather than the recovery of emotional intimacy.

Furthermore, several cases handled by the Religious Court revealed that couples involved in infidelity cases who chose reconciliation through mediation frequently continued to experience recurring marital conflicts (Dewanti, 2024). This observation is consistent with Informant 2's statement (March 2026): *"We argue all the time. Whenever I remember what he did, I become emotional every time we interact."*

These findings suggest that maintaining the relationship after infidelity does not necessarily coincide with psychological recovery. Unresolved emotional wounds resulting from betrayal continue to shape subsequent interactions, making communication with the partner more vulnerable to negative emotional responses. This experience was similarly expressed by Informant 1 (January 2026): *"I keep remembering the affair. Every time I talk to him, I become emotional, and we end up arguing more often."* From a psychological perspective, this condition can be understood through the concept of relational trauma, which explains that betrayal by a romantic partner fundamentally alters an individual's perception of the relationship, often giving rise to persistent feelings of anger, resentment, and emotional pain (Sharma, 2025). The findings further indicate that when emotional healing remains incomplete, unresolved emotional burdens continue to influence daily interactions and can easily manifest as repeated disagreements and marital conflict.

At the same time, the decision to maintain the marriage may provide an opportunity for the unfaithful partner to express remorse through behavioral changes and renewed efforts to rebuild the relationship. Such efforts may result in increased physical closeness and more frequent communication. Nevertheless, this renewed intimacy should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of complete relational recovery; rather, it often reflects the offending partner's sense of guilt and desire to make amends. As Informant 1 explained: *"After everything happened, we've actually become a little closer. His attitude has changed—he used to get angry easily, but now he doesn't. It's as if he feels guilty."*

This statement is supported by previous research on forgiveness, which suggests that, following the disclosure of infidelity, remorseful partners often engage in various reconciliation efforts as part of the forgiveness and relationship repair process (Arkam et al., 2022). Consequently, the decision to preserve the marriage indirectly creates opportunities for the emergence of new relational dynamics characterized by attempts to restore trust and emotional connection.

Overall, these relational dynamics demonstrate that the continuation of a marriage does not necessarily reflect the restoration of an ideal relationship. The decision to remain together does not automatically eliminate the psychological and relational consequences of infidelity. Instead, these consequences often persist over time and continue to influence the quality of the marital relationship. Thus, preserving the marriage should not be interpreted as resolving the underlying problem but rather as managing—or, in some cases, postponing—the long-term effects of betrayal.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the decision to maintain a marriage after infidelity among childless couples generates ambivalent consequences for the dynamics of the marital relationship. These consequences are not linear but instead reveal a coexistence of emotional deterioration and efforts toward relational repair. As a result, couples who choose to remain together undergo a complex process of adaptation, particularly in terms of emotional adjustment and interpersonal interaction. On the one hand, the relationship is characterized by declining marital harmony, reflected in increased conflict and emotional distance. On the other

hand, there is also evidence of more frequent interaction and greater physical and emotional proximity as both partners attempt to renegotiate and reconstruct their relationship after the experience of infidelity.

3. Normative Analysis of the Decision to Preserve the Marriage

The concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* was classically formulated by Imam al-Ghazali and later systematically developed by Imam al-Shatibi in *Al-Muwafaqat*. It encompasses the five fundamental objectives of Islamic law, collectively known as *al-kullīyyāt al-khams*, namely the preservation of progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). These five objectives are further classified into three hierarchical levels of necessity—*ḍarūriyyāt* (essentials), *ḥājīyyāt* (needs), and *taḥsīniyyāt* (embellishments)—based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as elaborated by Imam al-Ghazali, al-Shatibi, and Ibn Ashur (Fariedza & Misbahuzzulam, 2025). Within the context of this study, the decision of childless couples to preserve their marriage after infidelity is most appropriately analyzed through three principal objectives: the preservation of progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) as the primary normative foundation, the preservation of life and psychological well-being (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) as the critical criterion for determining whether such a decision produces *maṣlaḥah* (benefit) or *mafsadah* (harm), and the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*) as the spiritual foundation that underlies and motivates the decision to remain in the marriage.

The first objective, *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (the preservation of progeny), constitutes the central purpose of the institution of marriage in Islam. In the case of childless couples, this objective operates within two interrelated dimensions. The first is the prospective dimension. Couples who choose to remain married continue to possess the potential to have legitimate offspring in the future. From the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, preserving the marital relationship may therefore be understood as part of safeguarding future lineage. In other words, maintaining the marriage means preserving the legitimate institution through which future generations may be born and raised. Conversely, a hasty divorce before genuine reconciliation has been attempted may diminish the opportunity to establish a healthy and stable family. This suggests that the decision to remain together is not merely an effort to preserve the marital relationship itself but also an effort to preserve the continuity of the family institution.

The second dimension concerns protecting lineage from potential disruption. Marital conflicts that culminate in divorce may directly undermine *ḥifẓ al-nasl* by disrupting the family structure within which legitimate lineage is ideally protected. Accordingly, when an individual chooses to preserve the marriage after infidelity on the condition that the unfaithful spouse sincerely repents, such a decision indirectly prevents broader social and familial harm. This approach is consistent with the principle of *sadd al-dharā'i'* in *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, namely the principle of blocking the means that may lead to greater harm (Nurhadi, 2017).

The second principal objective is *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, the preservation of life and psychological well-being. Contemporary interpretations of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* understand *nafs* not merely as

physical survival but also as encompassing psychological integrity and mental health. From a subjective perspective, preserving a marriage after infidelity poses significant implications for *ḥifẓ al-nafs* on both sides of the relationship. For the betrayed spouse, remaining in the marriage without undergoing a genuine process of emotional healing may produce substantial psychological harm. Victims of infidelity frequently experience negative emotions, including anger, disappointment, anxiety, and depression, accompanied by declining affection, trust, and emotional concern toward their spouse. These consequences ultimately affect both the quality of the marital relationship and the sustainability of family life as a whole (Gandana, 2026).

Therefore, from the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, the decision to preserve the marriage can only be regarded as beneficial when it is accompanied by a sincere process of *islāḥ* (reconciliation and restoration) (Qonita, 2025). For the unfaithful spouse, remaining in the marriage on the basis of genuine repentance likewise serves as a means of protecting oneself from continuing destructive behavior. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Harry Yulianto, who argues that preserving a marriage after infidelity only fulfills the objectives of *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah* when it is accompanied by authentic spiritual and psychological transformation on the part of both spouses (Yulianto, 2025).

The decision to preserve a marriage after infidelity can also be understood through the legal maxim (*qa'idah fiqhīyyah*) in *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah*, which emphasizes the importance of preventing greater harm:

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Preventing harm takes precedence over attaining benefit.

Within this context, the participants perceived preserving the marriage as a preferable option compared to facing the potentially more severe consequences of divorce. As long as the relationship remained capable of being restored and did not result in greater harm—such as domestic violence or threats to an individual's physical or psychological safety—maintaining the marriage, despite the occurrence of infidelity, was regarded as the option that still embodied *maṣlaḥah* (public benefit). This, however, was contingent upon the existence of genuine *islāḥ* (reconciliation) between the spouses and sincere repentance on the part of the unfaithful partner.

The third objective, *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (the preservation of religion), differs from the two preceding objectives in that it functions not primarily as a structural or normative principle but rather as the spiritual foundation that motivates the decision to remain in the marriage. In Islam, marriage is regarded as a sacred covenant (*mithāqan ghalīẓan*) that occupies a highly significant position. Consequently, although divorce is legally permissible, it is viewed as a last resort when reconciliation is no longer possible. The findings of this study indicate that the participants retained a genuine desire to restore the relationship, provide another opportunity for their spouses, and preserve their marital commitment. Such attitudes reflect the influence of religious values in shaping the participants' perceptions of marriage. Their willingness to forgive, restrain negative emotions, and remain open to reconciliation demonstrates the practical implementation of Islamic values, including *ṣabr* (patience),

iṣlāḥ (reconciliation), and responsibility. Furthermore, the participants perceived preserving the marriage as part of fulfilling the trust and responsibility inherent in the marital covenant. Within the framework of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, preserving religion encompasses not only the performance of ritual worship but also the application of Islamic moral and ethical values in everyday life, including the management of marital conflict.

According to Munjiatun et al., infidelity directly violates the objective of ḥifẓ al-dīn because it constitutes a betrayal of the mīthāqan ghalīẓan—the solemn covenant established before Allah during the marriage contract—as stated in Qur'an 4:21 (Sūrah al-Nisā', verse 21). The Qur'an also explicitly condemns marital betrayal and acts that undermine trust, as reflected in Qur'an 8:27 (Sūrah al-Anfāl, verse 27) and Qur'an 24:11–15 as well as 24:30–31 (Sūrah al-Nūr). These verses embody two fundamental objectives of the Qur'an that are closely related to *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*: justice (*al-'adālah*) and moral responsibility (*al-amānah*) (Munjiatun et al., 2025). Accordingly, preserving a marriage after infidelity may be understood as an effort to restore the dimension of ḥifẓ al-dīn that has been compromised by betrayal, provided that such restoration is grounded in sincere repentance and a renewed commitment to practicing Islamic values within married life. The abuse of trust between husband and wife that leads to acts such as infidelity fundamentally contradicts Islamic teachings because preserving religion requires every aspect of life—including the sanctity and honor of marriage—to remain consistent with the principles of the Sharī'ah.

These three objectives of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* should not be understood as operating independently; rather, they complement and reinforce one another in establishing a comprehensive normative framework. Ḥifẓ al-nasl provides the normative justification for preserving the marriage. Ḥifẓ al-nafs serves as the empirical criterion for determining whether the decision genuinely produces benefit rather than harm. Meanwhile, ḥifẓ al-dīn functions as the spiritual foundation that ensures the decision is motivated by Islamic ethical principles. Consequently, the decision to preserve a marriage after infidelity should not be evaluated solely on the basis of whether the marriage continues to exist but rather on the extent to which these objectives of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* are realized within the marital relationship.

Within the context of this study, the participants' decision to preserve their marriages can be regarded as consistent with the objectives of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* because it was based on the expectation that the relationship could be restored, the sincere remorse demonstrated by the unfaithful spouse, and the willingness of both partners to pursue reconciliation. Moreover, the participants continued to perceive marriage as a valuable institution worthy of preservation. Under these circumstances, maintaining the marriage has the potential to realize maṣlaḥah by preserving family unity, sustaining the possibility of having legitimate offspring in the future, and facilitating the psychological and spiritual recovery of both spouses. In other words, the anticipated benefits remain greater than the potential mafsadah (harm) and adverse consequences resulting from the infidelity.

Nevertheless, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* does not regard preserving a marriage as the best choice under all circumstances. The decision to remain together may itself become a source of mafsadah if

the infidelity continues, the offending spouse fails to demonstrate genuine repentance, or the relationship results in prolonged psychological suffering for the betrayed partner. Under such circumstances, the objective of preserving life and psychological well-being (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) becomes compromised because the individual continues to live under emotional distress, anxiety, insecurity, and the erosion of personal dignity. Furthermore, if the marriage becomes characterized by violence, manipulation, or repeated betrayal, preserving the relationship can no longer be considered a realization of *maṣlaḥah*. At this point, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* recognizes divorce as a legitimate solution. Although divorce is generally regarded as a measure of last resort, its recognition within Islamic law demonstrates that Islam does not require individuals to remain in relationships that produce greater harm than benefit. When every sincere effort at *iṣlāḥ* has been exhausted without meaningful change, divorce may become an instrument for fulfilling the objectives of the *Sharī'ah*, particularly the preservation of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), and human dignity. Thus, under certain circumstances, divorce should not be viewed as a failure of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* but rather as one of the legitimate means through which its objectives may be realized.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* does not categorically classify the decision to preserve a marriage after infidelity among childless couples as either inherently right or inherently wrong. Rather, its conformity with the objectives of the *Sharī'ah* is conditional upon the extent to which the decision succeeds in realizing *maṣlaḥah* while preventing *mafsadah*. Accordingly, within this study, the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework functions not merely as a means of legitimizing the decision to remain in the marriage but also as an evaluative framework for determining whether that decision genuinely fulfills the higher objectives of Islamic law by promoting authentic human welfare.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the decision to preserve a marriage after infidelity among childless couples is shaped by a complex interaction of emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual factors rather than by the presence of children alone. These factors include support from family and the surrounding community, hope for the spouse's personal transformation, concern for the well-being of family members, fear of social stigma, the persistence of emotional comfort within the relationship, the desire to protect the spouse's dignity, and surrender to Allah's will. These findings contribute to the literature by expanding the understanding of post-infidelity marital resilience beyond child-related considerations, highlighting that childless couples also possess diverse motivations for maintaining their marriages. The study further reveals that preserving the marriage produces ambivalent relational consequences. While emotional intimacy and marital harmony often decline due to unresolved betrayal, increased interaction and reconciliation efforts may emerge as a result of the unfaithful partner's remorse and commitment to repairing the relationship. Consequently, maintaining the marriage should be understood as a process of adaptation rather than an indication of complete relational recovery. From the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, the decision to remain in the marriage cannot be judged as

inherently right or wrong. Its legitimacy depends on whether it promotes *maṣlahah* and prevents *mafsadah*, particularly in safeguarding religion, psychological well-being, and future family continuity. Practically, these findings underscore the importance of comprehensive family counseling and mediation that integrate emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions while enriching contemporary Islamic family law discourse through a *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah*-oriented approach to conflict resolution.

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