

# Revisiting Classical Exegesis on *Nushūz* in the Qur'an and Its Relevance to Contemporary Domestic Violence in Indonesia

Abdul Fatah, Abdul Karim, Mochamad Tholib Khoiril Waro  
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kudus, Indonesia  
[abdulfatah@iainkudus.ac.id](mailto:abdulfatah@iainkudus.ac.id)

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| <b>Keywords:</b><br><br>Classical exegesis, <i>ḍaraba</i> , domestic violence, <i>nushūz</i> .   | <b>Abstract</b><br><br>This study re-examines the classical interpretations of <i>nushūz</i> and <i>ḍaraba</i> found in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34, 128 and explores their relevance to domestic violence issues in Indonesia. The research method that was employed is a literature study that explores the words <i>nushūz</i> and <i>wadribū</i> ( <i>ḍaraba</i> : to hit) in QS. An-Nisā'[4]:34 and 128 through the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr from the perspective of gender equality. The findings indicate that al-Ṭabarī views <i>nushūz</i> as a wife's arrogance, al-Qurṭubī interprets it as animosity between spouses, and Ibn Kathīr regards it as the wife neglecting her obligations. In QS. An-Nisā' [4]:128, <i>nushūz</i> is understood as the husband's negligence or withdrawal from his wife. Meanwhile, <i>wadribūhunna</i> in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 is interpreted by al-Ṭabarī as a non-harmful physical measure, by al-Qurṭubī as a light, corrective action, and by Ibn Kathīr as a blow that causes no injury. Although these classical interpretations often depict the wife as the erring party and the husband as being in the right—a stance that risks perpetuating unequal power dynamics—the Qur'an itself underscores the principle of equality between men and women. In this light, <i>nushūz</i> should apply to both spouses, reflecting the possibility that either partner could be at fault. Al-Qurṭubī's understanding of <i>nushūz</i> as mutual hatred is more compatible with notions of gender equity. Additionally, interpreting <i>ḍaraba</i> as "offering guidance" or "providing a positive example" is more appropriate than viewing it as a physical strike, which can escalate into domestic violence. This reinterpretation, therefore, holds promise for fostering more equitable marital relationships in contemporary society.  |
| <b>Kata Kunci:</b><br><br>Tafsir klasik, <i>ḍaraba</i> , kekerasan rumah tangga, <i>nushūz</i> . | <b>Abstrak</b><br><br>Penelitian ini meninjau kembali penafsiran klasik terhadap <i>nushūz</i> dan <i>ḍaraba</i> dalam QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 dan 128, serta mengkaji relevansinya dengan isu kekerasan dalam rumah tangga di Indonesia. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi literatur yang mengeksplorasi kata-kata <i>nushūz</i> dan <i>wadribū</i> ( <i>ḍaraba</i> : memukul) dalam QS. an-Nisā'[4]:34 dan 128 melalui kitab tafsir al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, dan Ibnu Kathīr dengan perspektif keadilan gender. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa al-Ṭabarī memaknai <i>nushūz</i> sebagai kesombongan istri, al-Qurṭubī menafsirkannya sebagai kebencian di antara pasangan, dan Ibn Kathīr melihatnya sebagai istri yang mengabaikan kewajibannya. Dalam QS. An-Nisā' [4]:128, <i>nushūz</i> dipahami sebagai kelalaian atau sikap menjauh yang ditunjukkan oleh suami terhadap istrinya. Sementara itu, frasa <i>wadribūhunna</i> dalam QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 diartikan oleh al-Ṭabarī sebagai tindakan fisik yang tidak membahayakan, oleh al-Qurṭubī sebagai tindakan ringan bersifat korektif, dan oleh Ibn Kathīr sebagai pukulan yang tidak menimbulkan cedera. Meskipun penafsiran klasik ini kerap menggambarkan istri sebagai pihak yang bersalah dan suami sebagai pihak yang benar—yang berpotensi melanggengkan ketimpangan kekuasaan—Al-Qur'an sendiri menegaskan prinsip kesetaraan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Dengan demikian, <i>nushūz</i> seharusnya berlaku bagi kedua pihak, mencerminkan kemungkinan bahwa masing-masing pasangan dapat berbuat salah. Penafsiran al-Qurṭubī yang memandang <i>nushūz</i> sebagai kebencian timbal balik dipandang lebih selaras dengan gagasan kesetaraan gender. Selain itu, memaknai <i>ḍaraba</i> sebagai "memberikan bimbingan" atau "menjadi teladan yang positif" dianggap lebih tepat daripada menafsirkannya sebagai tindakan memukul yang dapat bereskalasi menjadi kekerasan dalam rumah tangga. Oleh sebab itu, pemaknaan ulang ini berpotensi mendorong terciptanya hubungan pernikahan yang lebih setara dalam masyarakat kontemporer. |
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## Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue worldwide,<sup>1</sup> including in Indonesia, where practical and concrete solutions are urgently needed. According to data from the United Nations Funds for Population Activities (UNFPA), one in four Indonesian women aged 15–64 has experienced violence at some point in her life.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection recorded 25,050 cases of violence against women throughout 2022—an increase of 15.2% compared to 2021. Of these cases, 58.1% occurred within the household (domestic violence). Regionally, East Java reported the highest number of victims (2,136), followed by Central Java (2,111) and West Java (1,819).<sup>3</sup> The National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) also reported 338,496 cases of violence against women and children in 2022, comprising 3,838 cases reported directly to *Komnas Perempuan*, 7,029 cases handled by service institutions, and 327,629 cases processed by the Religious Courts.<sup>4</sup> Despite some variations in reported data—highlighted by Umam Noer et al. regarding accuracy—these statistics underscore the severity of violence against women in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

Some factors contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence. Research by Lanchimba et al. identifies triggers such as education level, economic conditions, and interpretations of religious texts. Women with lower levels of education and fewer employment opportunities are more susceptible to violence, while economic disparities—notably higher unemployment rates among women compared to men—further exacerbate the problem. Religion and spiritual beliefs have also been shown to influence family dynamics, potentially perpetuating domestic violence in specific contexts.<sup>6</sup>

The impact of religious doctrines on domestic violence is illustrated by Maria Platt’s study of the Sasak community in Lombok, Indonesia, where marital relations are often viewed as unequal, especially in sexual matters. Husbands may be granted power and control to fulfill their desires without considering their wives’ well-being. This practice is sometimes legitimized by referencing particular Hadith that caution wives against refusing sexual relations. Such interpretations foster the idea that a wife should be perpetually passive and available, potentially leading to marital rape or other forms of sexual violence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luuk L Westerhof, “Domestic Violence – Can We Combat the Crime of Domestic Violence?,” *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2020): 45, <https://doi.org/10.33140/JHSS.03.01.07>.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA Indonesia, “Annual Report 2022,” 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Monavia Ayu Rizaty, “Ada 25.050 Kasus Kekerasan Perempuan di Indonesia pada 2022,” *DataIndonesia.id*, diakses 16 Juli 2024, <https://dataindonesia.id/ragam/detail/ada-25050-kasus-kekerasan-perempuan-di-indonesia-pada-2022>.

<sup>4</sup> Komnas Perempuan, “Bayang-bayang Stagnansi: Daya Pencegahan dan Penanganan Berbanding Peningkatan Jumlah, Ragam dan Kompleksitas Kekerasan Berbasis Gender terhadap Perempuan” (Jakarta, 2022), <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/siaran-pers-detail/peringatan-hari-perempuan-internasional-2022-dan-peluncuran-catatan-tahunan-tentang-kekerasan-berbasis-gender-terhadap-perempuan>.

<sup>5</sup> Khaerul Umam Noer, Siti Chadijah, dan Endang Rudiatin, “There Is No Trustable Data: The State and Data Accuracy of Violence Against Women in Indonesia,” *Heliyon* 7, no. 12 (2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08552>.

<sup>6</sup> Cintya Lanchimba, Juan Pablo Díaz-Sánchez, dan Franklin Velasco, “Exploring Factors Influencing Domestic Violence: A Comprehensive Study on Intrafamily Dynamics,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14 (2023): 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1243558>.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Platt, *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia*, 1 ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 51, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315178943>.

Similarly, the concept of *nushūz*—often referring to a wife's "disobedience" toward her husband—has been used to justify hitting a wife. According to Harwis and Djalal, *nushūz* can indeed trigger domestic violence,<sup>8</sup> a view supported by studies in Aceh showing that societal understanding of *nushūz* is associated with domestic violence and, in some cases, divorce.<sup>9</sup>

A pervasive perception within some Muslim communities in Indonesia is that Islamic values remain closely tied to patriarchal cultures, consequently diminishing women's rights. However, Mona Samadi argues that patriarchal influences are not unique to Islam but also affect other religions and communities.<sup>10</sup> Hence, a reform of religious understanding—founded on the principle of equality—is essential. This understanding includes reinterpreting Qur'anic verses, particularly QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 and 128, which mention *nushūz*. Such reinterpretation is necessary to align Islamic teachings with contemporary societal developments and to open new avenues of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning).<sup>11</sup> Re-examining key concepts in the Qur'an that might contribute to violence against women—such as the literal reading of *nushūz*, which some interpret as permitting a husband to hit a "disobedient" wife—poses both a challenge and an opportunity for promoting gender equality.

The family unit is the first environment in which a child learns to interact with others. Children witness and internalize various behaviors based on parental interactions, ranging from affection and respect to threats and bullying. Harmonious relationships between spouses have a positive influence on children's psychological well-being and behavior, whereas conflict and discord can lead to behavioral problems and emotional distress.<sup>12</sup> Research by Rahmayanti and Ismaidar reveals that domestic violence significantly disrupts family harmony, especially for wives and children, causing lasting trauma.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, providing a safe, supportive, and loving family environment is imperative for raising children who are emotionally healthy and non-violent.

Several scholarly works have examined domestic violence from a Qur'anic perspective. First, *The Problem of the Rebellious Religious Women: Pakistan, Gender, and the Islamic Revival* highlights the contradiction between Islam's glorification of women and the discrimination they face in Pakistan. The study advocates for broader engagement of

<sup>8</sup> Harwis dan Marini Abdul Djalal, "Nusyuz and Domestic Violence in Indonesia: Reinterpreting Punishment Using the Ma'nā al-Haml Method," *Al-Qadha : Jurnal Hukum Islam dan Perundang-Undangan* 10, no. 2 (2023): 163–64, <https://doi.org/10.32505/qadha.v10i2.6698>.

<sup>9</sup> Analiansyah dan Nurzakia, "Konstruksi Makna Nusyuz Dalam Masyarakat Aceh dan Dampaknya Terhadap Perilaku Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga (Studi Kasus di Kecamatan Ingin Jaya)," *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 5, no. 2 (2019): 151–56, <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v5i2.5602>.

<sup>10</sup> Mona Samadi, "Advancing the Legal Status of Women in Islamic law," in *Advancing the Legal Status of Women in Islamic Law*, International studies in human rights (Leiden; Boston: Brill | Nijhoff, 2021), 10, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004446953\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004446953_006).

<sup>11</sup> Samadi, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Krsti Poerwandari, *Penguatan Psikologis untuk Menanggulangi Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga dan Kekerasan Seksual* (Jakarta: Program Studi Kajian Wanita Program Pascasarjana Universitas Indonesia, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Rahmayanti dan Ismaidar, "The Effect of Domestic Violence (KDRT) on the Level of Harmony in the Family," *Randwick International of Social Science Journal* 4, no. 1 (2023): 100–105, <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v4i1.627>.

Pakistani women in Islamic revival movements to reshape societal norms.<sup>14</sup> Second, *The Quranic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia* explores how Hamka, a prominent Indonesian exegete, interpreted verses concerning women. His approach melds traditional interpretations with modern perspectives, affirming that women possess equal rights and opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Third, *Reconstruction of the Concept of Nushūz in Feminist Perspectives* redefines *nushūz* as defiance against Allah Swt, which applies to both husbands and wives, expanding the term beyond the wife's alleged disobedience.<sup>16</sup> Fourth, *Disobedience of the Wife: Its Provisions and Effects According to The Law and Islamic Law, A Comparative Study* compares wives' disobedience under civil and Islamic legal frameworks.<sup>17</sup> Finally, *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands: Controversies in Modern Qur'ānic Commentaries* addresses issues such as rebellious wives, sexually neglectful husbands, and polygyny, underlining how traditional and modern exegetes often interpret *nushūz* exclusively about women rather than treating it as applicable to both spouses.<sup>18</sup>

These studies lay the groundwork for further exploration of *nushūz*, particularly regarding how classical exegetes conceptualize this term—especially its most contentious aspect, *wadribū* (“to hit”)—in QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:34, and how this interpretation relates to the context of domestic violence in Indonesia. By investigating these linkages, it may be possible to propose alternative, more contextually relevant meanings of *nushūz* that uphold the principle of gender equality.

The present study employs a literature-based methodology, systematically reviewing texts on the concept of *nushūz* in QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:34 as interpreted by classical commentators—namely, Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Qurṭubī. These exegetes were chosen for their prominence and representativeness of early exegetical traditions. Al-Ṭabarī, regarded by Ignaz Goldziher as rich in references,<sup>19</sup> and Ibn Kathīr are among the most cited works in Qur'ānic studies, while al-Qurṭubī's legal focus makes his commentary particularly relevant for examining *nushūz*.<sup>20</sup> A gender-based analytical framework guides this research, grounded in the Islamic principle of equality between men and women. This principle is evident in several Qur'ānic passages (e.g., QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:32; al-A'rāf [7]:189; al-Taubah [9]:71; an-Nahl [16]:97; al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13) that emphasize equal opportunities, creation from a single origin, mutual support, and the primacy of piety over gender. By critically

<sup>14</sup> Meryem F Zaman, “The Problem of the Rebellious Religious Women: Pakistan, Gender, and the Islamic Revival,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 27, no. 2 (2020): 226–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz001>.

<sup>15</sup> Norbani B. Ismail, “The Quranic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia,” *Studia Islamica* 24 No. 3 (2017): 480, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v24i3.5187>.

<sup>16</sup> Alamsyah Alamsyah, “Rekonstruksi Konsep Nusyūz dalam Pemikiran Fikih Feminis Keadilan,” *AL-ADALAH* 15, no. 2 (2019): 298–300, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v15i2.3481>.

<sup>17</sup> Mahboba Mina, Thaer Muhammad Hussein Shukr, dan Luay Abed Kareem, “Disobedience of The Wife: Its Provisions and Effects According to The Law and Islamic Law, A Comparative Study,” *World Bulletin of Management and Law* 6 (2022): 64–65.

<sup>18</sup> Hadia Mubarak, *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 141–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197553305.001.0001>.

<sup>19</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Mazhab Tafsir; Dari Klasik Hingga Modern*, trans. oleh M Alaika Salamullah dan Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Pres, 2006), 112–14.

<sup>20</sup> Manā' bin Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥiṣ fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif li an-Nasyr wa at-Tawzī', 2000), 394–95; Muḥammad as-Sayyid Ḥusayn Adh-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn, Vol. 2* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1994).

revisiting classical interpretations and engaging with contemporary scholarship, this study addresses how interpretations of *nushūz* might contribute to domestic violence in Indonesia and whether these interpretations can be reconciled—or reinterpreted—to promote more equitable gender relations.

### The Interpretation of *Nushūz* in the Qur'an

The term *nushūz*, according to al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, derives from the root word *nashaza*, which signifies “an elevated area of land.” In the context of family life, *nushūz* denotes a wife’s anger toward her husband, coupled with an attitude of pride that leads her to disobey and even shift her attention to other men.<sup>21</sup> Quraish Shihab categorizes the word *nushūz* into three different usages: (1) standing up to offer one’s seat to someone who arrives late to a gathering, (2) disobedience within family life, and (3) picking up scattered items.<sup>22</sup> These diverse meanings indicate that *nushūz* depends heavily on context. In this study, *nushūz* is explicitly understood as disobedience within household affairs, referring to its usage in QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:34 and 128.

The Qur’anic verse Q. an-Nisā’ [4]:34 reads:

*34. Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding what Allah would have them guard in [the husband's] absence. However, those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance (nushūz) - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. Nevertheless, if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.*

Al-Ṭabarī interprets *al-qawwām* (the phrase “men are in charge of women”) as meaning that men are responsible for leadership and guidance, ensuring their families fulfill their religious and moral obligations. He argues that Allah grants men a measure of superiority in this regard, given that they pay the dowry, provide financial support, and meet other material needs.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Qurṭubī explains *al-qawwām* as undertaking responsibilities, namely caring for women, overseeing household matters, and ensuring compliance with religious regulations. According to this view, women should accept their husbands’ authority as long as it does not contravene Islamic law.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Kathīr likewise interprets *al-qawwām* as indicating men’s leadership, seniority, or authority over women, which includes the power to discipline them when they deviate from the prescribed path. Citing the Hadith of the Prophet, Ibn Kathīr even notes that a nation will not prosper if governed by women, reflecting the view that men inherently occupy a leadership role.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1 (Damaskus: Dār al-Qalam, ad-Dār asy-Syāmiyyah, 1992), 806.

<sup>22</sup> Quraish Shihab, *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur’an-Kajian Kosakata*, Vol. 1 (Lentera Hati, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Abū Ja’far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 8 (Lebanon: Mu’assasah ar-Risālah, 2000), 290.

<sup>24</sup> Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Abī Bakr bin Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī Shamsuddīn al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ fī Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 5 (Kairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), 168.

<sup>25</sup> Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā’īl bin ‘Umar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Aẓīm*, Vol. 2 (Lebanon: Dār Ṭayyibah li an-Nasyr wa at-Tawzī’, 1999), 292.

Concerning *nushūz* in this verse, al-Ṭabarī sees it as an expression of arrogance or opposition by a wife toward her husband, potentially leading to discord and even departure from the marital home.<sup>26</sup> Al-Qurṭubī describes *nushūz* more broadly as the mutual hatred between spouses,<sup>27</sup> while Ibn Kathīr derives it from *al-irtifā* (height), meaning a woman raising herself above her husband and neglecting her marital duties.<sup>28</sup>

The Qur'an proposes a three-step strategy when *nushūz* occurs: admonish the wife, abandon the marital bed, and, if these steps fail, *waḍribūhunna* (strike them). Although literally "to hit," Ibn Kathīr clarifies that the blow should be neither injurious nor harmful (*ḍarban ghayra mubarrihin*).<sup>29</sup> Al-Qurṭubī similarly holds that *waḍribūhunna* must not break bones or inflict serious harm; rather, it is intended as a corrective, educational measure.<sup>30</sup> Al-Ṭabarī also interprets "strike them" as a warning without causing physical injury.<sup>31</sup> The verse QS. an-Nisā' [4]:128 states:

*128. And if a woman fears from her husband contempt or evasion (nushūz), there is no sin upon them if they make terms of settlement between them - and settlement is best. And present in [human] souls is stinginess. But if you do good and fear Allah - then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.*

Al-Ṭabarī understands *nushūz* in the relevant verse as a form of arrogance toward one's spouse, manifesting in an attitude of superiority or dislike for various reasons. Another possible meaning is "turning away," which can involve emotional distancing or withholding certain benefits. Should a husband exhibit *nushūz*, the Qur'an instructs both spouses to seek reconciliation.<sup>32</sup>

In al-Qurṭubī's commentary, *nushūz* is contrasted with *i'rāḍ*. While *nushūz* involves physical or emotional distancing, *i'rāḍ* signifies a reluctance to communicate or a sense of discomfort within the marital relationship. Al-Qurṭubī links the revelation of this verse to the situation of Saudah bint Zam'ah, one of the Prophet's wives. A report from Tirmidhī, narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, recounts that Ibn 'Abbās feared the Prophet might divorce Saudah. In response, she requested that he not do so but instead allow her to transfer her allotted time to 'Ā'ishah. The Prophet granted her request, after which the verse was revealed. Meanwhile, according to a narration from al-Bukhārī and 'Ā'ishah, the verse was revealed concerning a man who wished to divorce his wife because he felt unable to meet her needs. The wife then offered financial compensation so that he would remain with her, prompting the revelation of the same verse.<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Kathīr identifies three marital circumstances in which Allah addresses the status of a husband and wife: when the husband distances himself from his wife when both spouses reach mutual agreement, and when the husband proceeds with divorce. In the first scenario,

<sup>26</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 8, 299.

<sup>27</sup> Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' fī Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 5, 171.

<sup>28</sup> Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Vol. 2, 295.

<sup>29</sup> Kathīr, 295.

<sup>30</sup> Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' fī Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 5, 172.

<sup>31</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 8, 313.

<sup>32</sup> Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 9 (Lebanon: Mu'assasah ar-Risālah, 2000), 267-68.

<sup>33</sup> Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' fī Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 5, 403.

if the wife fears her husband's emotional or physical withdrawal, she may choose to relinquish or reduce some of her entitlements—such as financial support, clothing, or shelter. If the wife elects to do so, the husband can accept without blame. Ibn Kathīr cites an-Nisā' [4]:128— "There is no blame upon them if they make terms of settlement between them – and settlement is best"—to emphasize that seeking peaceful resolution is preferable to divorce. One narration recounts that Saudah bint Zam'ah, fearing divorce, sought reconciliation by offering her time to 'Ā'ishah, which the Prophet accepted.<sup>34</sup>

Saudah's concern stemmed from her older age, her inability to compete with younger wives, and her knowledge of the Prophet's deep affection for 'Ā'ishah. Consequently, she relinquished her allotted time in favor of 'Ā'ishah. In another account, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is described as having treated each of his wives fairly, visiting them regularly and spending time with each one. When Saudah feared she would be overlooked due to her age, she said, "O Messenger of Allah, today is my [day], and I give [it] to 'Ā'ishah," upon which Allah revealed the verse under discussion. This event illustrates how the Qur'an sanctions mutual agreements and compromises to maintain harmony and avoid the dissolution of the marital bond.<sup>35</sup>

The summary of the interpretation of the two verses above is as follows:

| Basic Meaning of <i>Nushūz</i>                    | al- Ṭabarī   | al-Qurtubī   | Ibn Kathīr   |
|---|--|--|--|
|   | an-Nisā' [4]:34  | an-Nisā' [4]:34  | an-Nisā' [4]:34  |
| 1. Elevated land/raised land                      | <i>Nushūz</i> means arrogant and rebellious behavior carried out by a wife towards her husband. As for the word " <i>wadribūhunna</i> ," it means a warning, as for permissible hitting, it is the hitting that does not cause serious injury or harm. | " <i>Nushūz</i> " is defined by al-Qurtubī as the animosity of each partner towards the other. The word " <i>wadribūhunna</i> " means a physical hit that does not result in serious injury or bone fractures, such as a light hit intended for education. It aims to correct behavior, not to harm. | <i>Nushūz</i> means a woman who hates her husband, turns away from him, and neglects her duties as a wife. As for the phrase " <i>wadribūhunna</i> ," it is interpreted as a hit that does not cause injury or harm, such as a light hit intended only for correction and not to cause harm. |
| 2. Standing up to offer a seat to someone else    |  |  |  |
| 3. Disobedience within a household                |  |  |  |
| 4. Picking up/arranging things that are scattered |  |  |  |
|   | An-Nisā' [4]:128   | An-Nisā' [4]:128   | An-Nisā' [4]:128   |
|   | The turning away of a husband from his wife.   | The husband is afraid to keep his distance from his wife.  | The wife is worried that her husband will distance himself from her.   |

Source: researchers' analysis, 2024

Scholars have offered varying interpretations of the term *nushūz* in Sūrah an-Nisā' [4]:34 and [4]:128. In [4]:34, *nushūz* is often understood as a wife's disobedience toward her husband, whereas in [4]:128, it is seen as the husband's withdrawal from the wife due to her perceived shortcomings. In both cases, these interpretations frequently position women as the party at fault, reinforcing a gender bias and highlighting male dominance in the household. Notably, Ibn Kathīr interprets *qawwām* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 as granting men

<sup>34</sup> Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Vol. 2, 426.

<sup>35</sup> Kathīr, 427.

authority to “discipline” women, based on the phrase *bimā faḍḍalallāhu ba‘dahum ‘alā ba‘dīn* (“because Allah has made one of them excel the other”), which he views as indicating men’s superiority.<sup>36</sup>

From Ibn Kathīr’s perspective, if men exercise their mandate as heads of households with wisdom and fairness, the authority to discipline could foster harmony and affection within the family. However, without such wisdom, a husband might unfairly label his wife’s actions as *nushūz*, using the phrase “hit them” in QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:34 to justify physical violence. Although exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr emphasize that any act of “hitting” should be educational and non-injurious, the potential for abuse persists.

Interestingly, these same commentators also exhibit a measure of gender responsiveness by assigning protective responsibilities to men in the household while envisioning women -primarily- managing domestic affairs and child-rearing. However, the evolving realities of modern life—where many women also work, contribute financially, and may even earn more than men—underscore the importance of recalibrating gender roles. In the context of *nushūz*, either spouse can be at fault. Thus, if a husband is in the wrong, the wife should similarly have the right to offer counsel, withdraw from intimacy, or give a warning (an alternative interpretation of *wadribū*). Achieving the balance between husband and wife is a fair and practical strategy to maintain a harmonious family environment.

Maria Platt observes that while women often serve as key financial managers within families, this role does not necessarily elevate their status or guarantee more equitable treatment. Instead, women risk being perceived merely as objects in a dominantly patriarchal family structure.<sup>37</sup> A more equitable, culturally and religiously grounded arrangement could rectify such imbalances, as Kalsoom Paracha and Aiman Khalid argue, by challenging entrenched gender stereotypes and promoting a balanced relationship between men and women.<sup>38</sup> This principle likewise applies to interpreting *nushūz* in QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:128: “turning away” or “withdrawing” need not be attributed solely to men. Instead, the obligation to seek peace applies to both spouses, and either party—husband or wife—can initiate reconciliation.

The Qur’an itself articulates multiple affirmations of equality. Verses such as QS. Āl ‘Imrān [3]:195, QS. al-Aḥzāb [33]:35, and QS. an-Naḥl [16]:97 underscores those men and women alike receive commensurate rewards for good deeds. QS. al-Tawbah [9]:71 depicts them as protectors and supporters of one another<sup>39</sup> Abdelaziz Taalim, a Tunisian reformist, further notes that the fundamental Qur’anic principle of equality is enshrined in al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13, which declares all humankind to be descendants of one male-female pair, with piety as the sole measure of distinction. Legal interpretations thus ought to uphold this spirit of equality, ensuring that women are not relegated to an inferior status.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kathīr, 292.

<sup>37</sup> Platt, *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Kalsoom Paracha dan Aiman Khalid, “Inclusiveness of Women’s Empowerment in Muslim Societies,” *Islamic Studies* 62, no. 2 (2023): 275–76, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v62i2.2362>.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Freyer Stowasser, “Women and Citizenship in the Qur’an,” in *Woman, the Family and divorce laws in Islamic History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>40</sup> Christina Jones-Pauly dan Abir Dajani Tuqan, *Women under Islam: Gender, Justice and the Politics of Islamic Law*, *Library of Islamic Law* (London: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), 22.



Although *ḍaraba* in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34 is translated as "to strike," classical exegeses by al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr frame it as a non-harmful, disciplinary measure meant to correct behavior. Nevertheless, the act of "hitting" carries connotations of violence, possibly legitimizing physical force against wives labeled as disobedient. Kristi Poerwandri categorizes such actions—slapping or striking—as physical violence, which is one of five forms of abuse (physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and spiritual).<sup>41</sup> Consequently, numerous contemporary scholars propose alternative interpretations of *ḍaraba*—such as "to leave," "to avert harm," "to set a positive example," or "to bring about an effect"—that rely on peaceful conflict resolution, beginning with advice and, if necessary, a temporary separation rather than physical contact.<sup>42</sup>

Grammatically, *ḍaraba* follows the pattern *ḍaraba-yaḍribu-ḍarban*. According to M. Quraish Shihab, this root in its noun and verb forms occurs 58 times in the Qur'an across 28 different surahs. As cited by Quraish Shihab, ar-Rāghib explains that *ḍaraba* typically denotes hitting one object against another—by hand, stick, sword, or other means—and can signify causing harm with or without a weapon. Over time, however, the term has acquired additional meanings, including (1) striking, (2) beheading, (3) cutting, (4) encompassing, (5) traveling, (6) creating, (7) presenting an example, and (8) covering. Quraish Shihab concludes that "giving an example" or "offering a parable" is among its most common usages, thereby suggesting that alternative understandings of *ḍaraba* in an-Nisā' [4]:34 remain both textually viable and theologically sound.<sup>43</sup>

### Theological Influences on Violent Behavior

Religious and cultural views can significantly shape individuals' actions, including how spouses interact within a household. Research by Sukendar underscores that unequal power dynamics between husbands and wives in Java do not solely arise from a patriarchal culture but are also influenced by certain theological teachings. One such example is *'Uqūd al-Lujain fī Bayān ḥuqūq al-Zawjain* (The Chain of Two Pearls: The Explanation of the Rights of a Couple), a text commonly taught in many Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), particularly in Java. This text includes the notion that if a wife refuses sexual intercourse with her husband, she will be cursed by the angels until morning.<sup>44</sup> Such a unilateral view can grant men perceived legitimacy to demand sexual relations under any circumstance, potentially leading to marital rape. Maria Platt's study corroborates those imbalanced theological views can perpetuate violence against women, including marital rape.<sup>45</sup>

Hakimi's research further reveals how violent behavior within a household can be transmitted from generation to generation. Children who witness one parent committing

<sup>41</sup> Achie Sudiarti Luhulima, ed., *Pemahaman Bentuk-bentuk Tindak Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan dan Alternatif Pemecahannya* (Jakarta: Pusat Kajian Wanita UI, 2000), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Norbani B Ismail, "The Quranic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 3 (2017): 484, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v24i3.5187>.

<sup>43</sup> Shihab, *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an-Kajian Kosakata, Vol. 1*, 171–72.

<sup>44</sup> Sukendar Sukendar et al., "Women's Access To Justice: Mediation For The Victims of Domestic Violence In Central Java, Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 609, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.9471>.

<sup>45</sup> Platt, *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia*, 85.

violence against the other—be it the husband toward the wife or vice versa—often internalize this behavior as usual. Boys who observe domestic violence may replicate such conduct in adulthood, while girls who experience violence may come to view it as a routine part of marital life.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the Qur'an does not condone such practices. QS. an-Nisā' [4]:19 commands believers to treat their wives with kindness (*wa 'āshirūhunna bil-ma'rūf*), highlighting Islam's emphasis on family harmony and the maintenance of marital bonds.<sup>47</sup>

In response to these imbalanced theological views, a gender-sensitive approach has been proposed for interpreting Qur'anic texts. This perspective includes presenting an equal understanding of the concept of *nushūz* for both men and women and reinterpreting the word *ḍaraba* to mean “giving an example” or “issuing a warning.” In cases where *nushūz* (disobedience) arises, either spouse—husband or wife—can provide guidance, moral support, or a reminder to restore the relationship to a positive and cooperative footing. Such a reading aligns with classical interpretations by exegetes like al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, who view *nushūz* as mutual hostility or opposition and *ḍaraba* as a corrective, non-harmful measure. The contemporary proposal to interpret *ḍaraba* as “offering a role model” or “giving a warning” reduces the risk of violence.

This reexamination of Qur'anic concepts holds particular relevance in today's context, where domestic violence remains a serious issue in Indonesia. In 2022, around 20,050 women were reported as victims of violence, with East Java recording the highest number of cases at 2,136.<sup>48</sup> While these figures cannot be conclusively linked to specific religious interpretations, studies by Lanchimba et al. note that domestic violence often involves factors such as education, economic conditions, and understanding of religious texts.<sup>49</sup> Similar findings by Maria Platt and Sukendar et al. reinforce the influence of theological doctrines in shaping violent behavior within Indonesian households.<sup>50</sup>

A more balanced household dynamic is achieved by extending the application of *nushūz* to both wives and husbands who fail to uphold their marital responsibilities. This interpretation situates spouses equally, making them jointly responsible for fostering a harmonious, violence-free family environment. Furthermore, the term *ḍaraba* frequently read as a permission to use force, is reconfigured to emphasize constructive methods—such as teaching by example or providing moral guidance—thereby removing any implication of physical harm.

In practice, such constructive approaches can take multiple forms. First, open dialogue allows spouses to identify underlying issues and resolve conflicts through empathy and respectful listening. Second, moral and spiritual support, such as shared acts of worship or joint study of religious teachings on harmony and love, reinforces positive interactions. Finally, demonstrating patience, compassion, and accountability within the household is a

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<sup>46</sup> Mohammad Hakimi, ed., *Membisu Demi Harmoni; Kekerasan Terhadap Isteri dan Kesehatan Perempuan di Jawa Tengah, Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LPKGM-FK-UGM, 2001), 65.

<sup>47</sup> Abdul Fatah, *Al-Qur'an dan Isu-Isu Kontemporer, Dialektika antara Teks dan Realitas* (Yogyakarta: Tonggak Media, 2023), 113–15.

<sup>48</sup> Ayu Rizaty, “Ada 25.050 Kasus Kekerasan Perempuan di Indonesia pada 2022.”

<sup>49</sup> Lanchimba, Díaz-Sánchez, dan Velasco, “Exploring Factors Influencing Domestic Violence: A Comprehensive Study on Intrafamily Dynamics,” 3–4.

<sup>50</sup> Platt, *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia*, 85; Sukendar et al., “Women's Access To Justice: Mediation For The Victims of Domestic Violence In Central Java, Indonesia,” 609.

powerful example that can guide the other partner back to a path of kindness and mutual respect. These non-violent strategies help cultivate a family life rooted in cooperation, understanding, and shared responsibility.

## Conclusion

Domestic violence remains a significant concern in Indonesia, as highlighted by a UNFPA report indicating that one in four women has experienced violence. Various factors, including economic disparities, educational background, and religious interpretations, contribute to this issue. This study examines the theological dimension of domestic violence by revisiting classical exegeses on *nushūz* and *waḍribūhunna* in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34 and 128, focusing on the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr. The findings indicate that *nushūz* is predominantly understood as a wife's rebellion or defiance, with *waḍribūhunna* interpreted as a corrective yet non-harmful disciplinary measure. However, these interpretations risk reinforcing gender inequality by positioning women as the primary subjects of disobedience while upholding male authority.

A critical reassessment of these classical interpretations suggests the need for a more balanced approach that aligns with the Qur'anic principles of justice and gender equity. Rather than exclusively attributing *nushūz* to wives, this term should be understood as a possible failing of both spouses, as supported by al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of *nushūz* as mutual discord. Furthermore, an alternative reading of *ḍaraba*—shifting its meaning from "to hit" to "to provide guidance" or "to serve as an example"—offers a non-violent resolution that emphasizes moral and ethical education. This reinterpretation challenges patriarchal readings that justify domestic violence and instead advocate for constructive conflict resolution, such as open dialogue, emotional support, and positive role modeling in marital relationships.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited in scope as it primarily focuses on scriptural exegesis without incorporating a broader interdisciplinary analysis. Future research could explore additional theological concepts that may influence domestic violence and investigate their intersection with social, psychological, and legal frameworks. A more comprehensive approach, integrating gender-sensitive interpretations and contemporary socio-religious dynamics, could provide deeper insights into reducing domestic violence in Indonesia while ensuring that Qur'anic teachings promote justice and equality in familial relationships.

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