

## WOMEN'S BODILY EXPERIENCES AS AN EPISTEMIC BASIS FOR KUPI'S QURANIC INTERPRETATION

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### *Abstract*

*Feminist scholarship has advanced reinterpetive approaches grounded in principles of justice and gender equality. These approaches seek to deconstruct entrenched patriarchal biases in Quranic Interpretation. They validate women's knowledge and experiences as authoritative epistemic sources. The Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI) places women's bodily experiences at the center of its gender-fair Quranic interpretation. This article aims to explore the epistemological basis of such interpretation. It does so by examining women's bodily experiences, interpretive strategies, and implications. Using primary sources, including official KUPI documents and relevant literature, this study employs content analysis from a feminist standpoint theory by Harding. The study concludes that KUPI recognizes the unique experience of women's bodily experiences as an epistemological base of interpretation. KUPI has a strategy to integrate women's perspectives and experiences in reading the Quranic text. This process begins with problem identification and reflection, and proceeds to the construction of a re-narration of verse interpretation. KUPI's choice to utilize women's bodily experiences supports the documentation of women's experiences and the transformation of women's body knowledge into collective knowledge and communal narratives. This process legitimizes women's bodily experiences as new, legitimate, and authoritative knowledge. KUPI's interpretative model affirms women's bodily experience as*

*an epistemic subject. This study contributes to Quranic scholarship on feminist tafsir or exegesis. It asserts women's bodily experiences as an epistemic authority in Quranic exegesis, breaking masculine dominance and producing an Indonesian gender-fair interpretation.*

**Keywords:** *epistemic authority; KUPI; quranic interpretation; women's bodily experiences*

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## Introduction

Patriarchal structures have significantly shaped the way the Quran is interpreted, frequently legitimizing and perpetuating gender inequality. In response, feminist scholarship has advanced reinterpreted approaches rooted in principles of justice and gender equality, seeking to deconstruct entrenched patriarchal biases. These approaches produce alternative readings of the Quran validating women's knowledge and experiences as authoritative epistemic sources (Mohases 2021, 514).

Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, hereinafter referred to as KUPI) has provided women's perspectives and women's experiences to be considered more broadly in interpreting religious texts. The first KUPI Congress, held in Cirebon in 2017, and the second KUPI Congress, held in 2022 in Jepara, produced a distinctive religious view by incorporating women's experiences as a methodological basis (Kodir 2021, 124). KUPI aims to integrate women's perspectives into existing methods of Islamic studies, encompassing both those proposed by classical scholars and those developed by contemporary Muslim scholars. KUPI's choice is driven by the view that ignoring women's unique experience often results in religious knowledge that has a negative impact and even harms women (Rofiah 2020, 45). The necessity of involving women's experience and knowledge is further manifested in the granting of authority to women in interpreting texts and conducting religious deliberations (Rofiah et al. 2024, 15).

Previous research on KUPI generally discusses female authority (Ismah 2016, 461; Nisa 2019, 434; Ulfiyati 2019, 25; Nadia & Faizah 2024, 77), KUPI's agency and contribution as a movement in gender mainstreaming, moderation, policy, and legal reform (Ghosiya 2023, 12; Junaidi 2023, 3;

Kabir 2023, 128; Su'ada & Hannah 2023, 119; Rinaldi et al. 2024, 355), and KUPI methods (Kodir et al. 2024, 520). The studies on the interpretation of KUPI are only limited to tracing the genealogy of feminist interpretation (Ma'ruf et al. 2022, 128; Wijaya et al. 2025, 78), the moral movement of women scholars in carrying out moderate nationalism views (Kusmana 2019, 85; Labibah et al. 2022, 90; Rizki 2025, 270), the counter-narrative strategy carried out, the traces of Quranic women's justice interpretation in KUPI's fatwa (Rofiah et al. 2024, 16), and KUPI approach to the Quran and Hadith reinterpretation (Nurmila 2025, 42). Research on the epistemological basis of KUPI interpretation has not been conducted so far. Thus, to reconstruct the epistemology of KUPI's interpretation and the reasoning behind it, based on the reality of life and the knowledge of women's bodily experiences, is crucial to the focus of the study.

The position of women with unique experiences, both on social and biological experiences, affords them a superior epistemic position (Soleh et al. 2023, 2; Muafiah et al. 2024, 39). KUPI represents the practice of interpretive epistemology based on women's bodily experiences. Women's experiences in the KUPI forum are used as the basis for reformulating interpretations. The experience of women's bodily experiences, which is usually absent in the dominant interpretation (Izza et al. 2025, 121), is revealed and becomes the basis for the epistemological reconstruction of women as subjects of Islamic knowledge. Thus, the reasoning behind KUPI's interpretation reveals a shift in the representation of women's bodily experiences and knowledge.

### Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach through library research focusing on women's bodily experiences as authoritative epistemic sources in Quranic exegesis. This study focuses on KUPI's strategies to validate women's bodily experiences of Quranic interpretation. The primary sources of this research include the methodology of KUPI's *fatwa*, the results of religious deliberations (*Musyawah Keagamaan*) at the 2nd Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI), and relevant online materials from "kupipedia.id".

The methodological framework is grounded in Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory (Harding 2004, 213). Harding argues that knowledge is never neutral, but it is always shaped by the social, political, and subject positions that produce it. By situating women's bodily experiences and perspectives as a starting point of interpretation, the methodological steps of

this study are as follows: (1) examining the primary data related to women's bodily experiences within KUPI text; (2) describing the reasoning of KUPI interpretations that are rooted in women's bodily experiences; (3) identifying KUPI's strategies in positioning women's bodily experiences and making comparison with another Quranic interpretation grounded in women-centered readings; and (4) analyzing the implications of using women's bodily experiences in KUPI's interpretative framework within Harding's lens that assert women as a subject of Quranic Exegesis.

## Results and Discussion

### Considering Women's Bodily Realities for Interpreting the Quran

KUPI states that the experiences and realities of women's lives must be among the considerations in determining religious views. Women's experience is defined as something that is actually felt and faced by women in their lives (Kodir 2021, 199). This is based on the fact that the experience of the female body is essentially a human reality, like the one felt by men. It is just that what happened to women is dissimilar due to the biological and social differences between men and women. Biologically, women experience exceptional conditions related to reproductive functions e.g. menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, and breastfeeding. While socially, because of their gender, women experience discrimination, subordination, discriminatory stigma, marginalization, double burden, and various violence.

The difference in human experience between men and women can be seen in the rape case (Rofiah 2020, 45). Rape victims will be pregnant, give birth, go through postpartum period, and breastfeed. People stigmatize women as dirty and is often blamed for the rape they experienced. Unfortunately, men do not experience these effects. Hence, religious views related to rape victims, for example, need to consider the psychology of female victims.

KUPI asserts that in the formulation of religious narratives, the reality of women's lives must be recognized, raised, and made the authority of knowledge. Women's experience is a consideration in formulating KUPI's religious views. The recognition of women's life experiences is positioned and recognized as the realities of human beings as a whole and complete subjects of law (Gumiandari & Nafi'a 2020, 33). Women's unique experiences related to menstruation, pregnancy, postpartum, childbirth, and breastfeeding should be counted. For example, most women experience premenstrual syndrome (PMS)-an episode before monthly menstruation when they suffer

abdominal pain, headaches, aches, nausea, and even loss of consciousness or fainting. If these realities are not recognized as scientific authority, they will lead to religious narratives that ignore or even harm women. In Fiqh, women who experience PMS have not yet bled, so sexual intercourse between husband and wife can be done. Religious narratives that only consider the legal/Fiqh aspects and ignore the psychological difficulties of wives during PMS, may force women to serve their husbands. For KUPI, a religious narrative that accommodates women's experiences will, in turn, recommend sympathy, empathy, and attention to accompany and alleviate the pain suffered by women (Kodir 2021, 204).

KUPI criticizes religious narratives ignoring women's realities. Some of them include the narrative of the reasons for the permissibility of polygamy. One of frequently mentioned reasons is to protect women since people said that women's population is twice the number of men. The statement is ungrounded as population statistics of both Indonesia and other countries do not affirm it. One of the approaches used by KUPI is the Ultimate Justice/*Keadilan Hakiki* approach. Rofiah emphasized that women's special conditions need to be considered and become the basis for understanding the text. Considering women's special conditions means utilizing women's real experiences as individuals and members of society, both within the state and globally. These women-specific conditions encompass both biological and social conditions (Kodir 2021, 11; Rofiah 2025, 1). Women's realities must be recognized as the authority of knowledge, *fatwa*, law, and considered in policy-making.

To establish historical validity, KUPI believes that the use of women's bodily experiences has roots in the long history of Islamic scholarship. Kodir (2021) mentions the basis of the practice carried out by the Prophet and the scholars, especially Fiqh scholars. Sunnah narratives that mention the Prophet's consideration of the experiences and knowledge of women can be found in many cases. For example, the Prophet approved the views of Habibah bint Sahl, who filed a divorce (al-Bukhari 1994, 5330). Moreover, some jurists, such as al-Shafi'i, used women's bodily experiences through the *istiqra'* method when discussing the minimum and maximum limits of menstruation and *nifas* (blood seen after childbirth).

Fayumi incorporated the views of contemporary *Ushul Fiqh* scholars who consider social reality as a source of law, including women's experiences (Ulya 2018, 68). Legal views are not only based on *Qauliyyah* verses but also

*Kauniyyah*. Egypt's *Darul Ifta'* includes signs of Allah's greatness in the universe, in human, biological, body and soul, and individual and social aspects as a reference. Based on this methodological basis, KUPI emphasizes the need to read the *Kauniyyah* verses in the form of data, facts, as well as biological, psychological, and social realities of women, especially when formulating religious views related to women's bodily experiences and lives.

### Embodying Women's Realities in KUPI's Quran Interpretation

Understanding KUPI's *tafsir* is best understood through its religious perspective which was the result of their theological contemplation. In KUPI's meetings, the members discuss various social and national issues started by identifying each issue through an inventory of women's bodily experiences, encompassing both biological and social aspects. This problem identification process is called *tassawwur*. For example, when discussing the marginalization of women in protecting the Republic of Indonesia from the danger of violence in the name of religion, KUPI begins by recognizing women's vulnerability. It emphasizes women as victims and affected parties in the religious-based violence. KUPI states,

*"Women are the most disadvantaged group and experience multiple vulnerabilities in violence justified by religious claims, which clearly threatens the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). ... The social structure that persists to disempower women lead to multiple vulnerabilities. These are reflected in four categories: vulnerable groups, exposed groups, perpetrators, and affected parties. In reality, women have distinctive experiences that differ from those of men. They are a force that has always been an essential component in maintaining and caring for the NKRI"* (KUPI 2023, 6).

Women's vulnerability in religious-based terrorism roots from social conditions that demand their absolute devotion as wives, children, and students. They are easily indoctrinated because financially women are dependent and their knowledge are often disregarded. Thus, the female body becomes an arena for politicization and symbolic violence expressed through *jihad*, *hijrah*, marriage, and childbirth. KUPI, for example, presents data on how women are exposed to extreme ideologies and terrorism. It also points out women's roles in terrorism based on individual research, official reports, and reviews of regulations. For example, KUPI utilizes several studies as evidence that women have become the leading actors, in addition to other

strategic roles—such as facilitators, recruiters, fundraisers, couriers, and nurses—in terrorism and extremist activities.

In formulating KUPI's religious perspective, women's bodily experiences are depicted, covering social, biological and reproductive aspects. This disclosure is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are from testimonies of women—both victims and perpetrators—, research, and official documents. Meanwhile, the secondary sources are obtained from mass media and other relevant documents.

When discussing about women's involvement in terrorism, KUPI analyzed the state policies to tackle extremism, such as Law Number 5 of 2018 on Terrorism and Presidential Regulation Number 7 of 2021 concerning the 2020-2024 National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism. KUPI argue that these policies do not adequately addressing women's issues and implement gender mainstreaming. Men are seen as the main beneficiaries of these regulations, unlike women who are ignored in the government's efforts of terrorism prevention. KUPI implements completely different way when identifying the problems by addressing women's bodily experiences and issues. In discussing forced marriage, KUPI uses data from the 2021 *Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (National Commission on Violence Against Women, hereafter mentioned as Komnas Perempuan) Report stating that the majority of victims are women. This forced marriage eventually impacts women's reproductive health and, according to Agustina (2023), affects their spirituality and religiosity.

Similar approach is applied in the discussion of rape-related abortion. Komnas Perempuan's data show that the number of rape cases in Indonesia continues to increase, as does the level of physical and psychological disorders suffered by women who become pregnant due to rape (Komnas Perempuan 2025, 165). The support for the termination of pregnancies of rape victims experiences legal, cultural, and religious interpretation constraints. KUPI provides an overview of the bodily experiences of female victim of rape that are different from those of male rape offenders. The men's biological conditions have no traces of rape, so they do not experience social and legal sanctions. This is unfortunately different from what the victims experience. They bear psychological and physical burdens due to unwanted pregnancy and birth. As a result, they often violate the law, such as performing illegal abortions, throwing and killing babies, and even committing suicide (Komnas Perempuan 2025, 170).

When performing religious deliberations on women's bodily experiences, KUPI uses primary sources, besides relying on secondary sources. A female mentor of a *pesantren* in Makassar revealed during the 2022 KUPI forum that, according to a survey, 100 female students had to quit schools due to forced marriage. Moreover, they also experienced domestic and economic abuses which led to divorce cases, because of which they were ostracized by their families and suffered mental disorders (KUPI 2023, 124).

Another issue addressed by KUPI is the attempt to protect women from genital cutting and injury (known as FGC, Female Genital Cutting) without medical reasons. In this matter, KUPI shared testimonies about victims of that case—a mother, suffering psychological trauma, and a doctor, sharing about her patient who has dysfunction in sexual relations. These were revealed during a *halaqah* (gathering) of KUPI held before the official meeting.

KUPI's interpretation model has utilized women's bodily experiences as the initial data to reflect and narrate the reinterpretation of the Quranic verse. Authentic experiences include physical and psychological wounds, rights over one's body, biological functions, and social experiences. KUPI places women's collective experience as one of the epistemic bases for formulating religious views, in addition to the Quran, Sunnah, Constitution, and positive law. Therefore, women's realities, which are often invisible, are transformed into collective and communal experiences that they can openly share. Moreover, insights on their realities, which are generally conveyed through oral culture, are now transformed into documented knowledge.

KUPI is not the first one to include women's bodily experiences in the Quran interpretation. Several Muslim feminists, such as Amina Wadud, have declared the methodological basis of interpretation based on women's experiences and knowledge. Wadud criticizes traditional interpretations written exclusively by men that their vision and experience become the sole shapers of interpretation without considering women's perspectives. She challenges the nihilism inherent in traditional interpretations of women's visions, perspectives, desires, and needs. She writes:

*"I intend to provide an interpretation of the Quran in which women's experiences are included and without the stereotypes that have been created in most male interpretive frameworks"* (Muhsin 1994, 50).

Based on this epistemology, Wadud interprets the Quranic verse on the event of childbirth experienced by Maryam and memorialized in Q.S. Maryam [19]:23-26 as a form of Quranic respect for women's unique reproductive function. She argues that the stories of women in the Quran are often interpreted without reflecting real issues faced by women (Muhsin 1994, 50). Another issue portrayed by Wadud is the story of the Prophet Musa's return to be breastfed by his mother which should be interpreted as a woman's struggle to fulfill God's command with tenderness and maternal instinct. His mother shows how to believe with love and care in addition to fear and anxiety. Additionally, this verse demonstrates that women can receive revelation just as men.

The reality experienced by women's that Wadud criticizes is the traditional division of women's roles in caring for children. She challenges the notion that some people tend to view the obligation of caring for children as women's inherent and essential responsibility. Consequently, this view renders all forms of childcare and domestic work as women's burdens. In fact, according to Wadud, Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:233 places the childcare as a joint responsibility of husband and wife. She states,

*"The mothers shall suckle their offspring for two whole years if they desire to complete the term of breastfeeding. But, the fathers shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden beyond what it can bear. No mother, nor father, shall be mistreated on account of her or his child. An heir shall be treated in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, it should be based on mutual consent and consultation. If you decide on a foster mother for your offspring, no one should blame you; you must provide the pay for the foster mother and what she offers on equitable terms. But you must fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what you do"* (Muhsin 1994, 50).

KUPI's use of women's bodily experiences is a continuation of the efforts of previous Muslim scholars in integrating women's realities in *tafsir* activities. The thing is KUPI puts women's data from the beginning as initial foundation for interpretation. Furthermore, KUPI utilizes these women's experiences to produce interpretations that have a positive impact on women's welfare.

### **The Implications of Embodying Women's Realities in KUPI's Reasoning**

KUPI's main focus is to integrate women's bodily experiences in an attempt of the Quran interpretation. Turning the unnoticed women's realities visible definitely has profound effects.

#### *Constructing Women's Collective Experiences*

KUPI collects and documents the stored and often invisible women's bodily experiences. This is due to the masculinity of data perspectives, where women realities are not considered valid and not used as a source of knowledge. This becomes the center of KUPI critiques. So far, knowledge has been built around men—their thoughts, ideas, needs, and life experiences. Meanwhile, women's sides have been relatively underrepresented in research (Hayati 2012, 28). Hence, women's subjectivity and personal experiences become indispensable as they are often hidden.

For example, the traumatic experiences of women who underwent FGC as children were never disclosed by them outside the safe space. This new insight they experienced, is expected to give rise to fundamental moral considerations for women's rights (Gilligan 2013, 99). These hurtful incidents which were initially just personal experiences, conveyed through testimonies and community discussions, were transformed into collective narratives. These KUPI narratives are then constructed to be the 'embodied knowledge' or 'experiential knowledge'.

#### *Building Authoritative Knowledge from Women's Bodily Experiences*

KUPI's efforts to build knowledge from women's empirical experiences and feelings shape the methodological basis of feminist studies (Zulminarni 2021, 46). Women experience their bodies socially and politically, not just biologically. Thus, they can be the basis of epistemology as Young states,

*"The lived body is a crucial starting point for feminist ethics and knowledge, because social structures inscribe themselves onto the female body"* (Young 2005, 2015).

In line with Young, Bordo (1993, 112) emphasizes that women's bodily experiences become grounds where ideology works subtly and internally. Women often adapt their bodies to conform to religious, dominant cultural, moral, and state regulations. As an epistemic arena, the female body becomes

a place where women negotiate, realize, resist, or are shaped by certain ideologies.

Taking women's bodily experiences into consideration means that they become legitimate sources of knowledge in KUPI's interpretation process, ensuring benefits for women. In other words, interpretation must be in line with reality, such as considering the unjust experiences of women in terms of both biological and social factors. It is only right to go from text to socio-historical context and to voice women's concerns when doing interpretation. When KUPI implements these experiences, they are transformed substantially and are recognized as insights. Things that were initially marginalized and unworthy shift into meaningful and appraised perception needed by society. Other women can use these experiences as references for making decisions and solving problems. For society, these realities must be the starting point to eliminate the injustice faced by women and to enrich the insight within society dominated by masculine perspectives.

KUPI's decision to write about and validate women's bodily experiences is a strategic step. Women often experience difficulties which are frequently referred to as the law of silence. Social conditions force women to hold themselves back, suppress their feelings, and think that what they experience is their own burdens. There is an obscurity in their bodily experiences so they keep it undisclosed, feel uneasy to convey and show it to others, especially in the public sphere.

Centering the women's bodily experiences in the Quran interpretation, as Rofiah (2020) suggests, is the only way out of an understanding of Islam that often positions men as the sole standard of benefit. Adopting a single standard of benefit creates serious problems for women. First, women's biological and social experiences are disregarded because they are not taken care of by men. Second, the benefit is measured by its impact only on men. The effect on women, despite being *mafsadah* and *madarrat*, is often ignored. Third, things that are beneficials for women are frequently overlooked because they are perceived as unnecessary for men.

#### *Reframing Biased Exegesis from Women's Experiences as Moral Epistemology*

Women's biological and social experiences presented by KUPI imply the existence of unequal interpretations of religious texts prevailing in society. For example, women who became martyrs or *mujahidah* in religious-based terrorism admitted being indoctrinated with the misleading spiritual perception that a wife must be devoted to her husband and a child must obey

the father. Moreover, women's obedience is often abused, for example, by their husbands to give birth to many children, or to commit crime in the name of religion (KUPI 2023, 21). This abuse on women's compliance is also found in forced marriage cases. Parents misinterpret fiqh provisions on the guardian's rights to a coerced marriage without their daughters' consent (*ijbar*) (KUPI 2023, 125).

In constructing a counter-narrative against misinterpretations and their impact on women's bodily experiences, KUPI does not inevitably respond by directly reinterpreting the verses in question. Likewise, it does not explicitly present alternative verses, even when such references exist in other documents. For example, in the forced marriage issue, KUPI states that the Quran actually prohibits parents from preventing women who have voluntarily chosen their future husbands (Kodir 2021, 152). This is written in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:232,

*"When you divorce women, and they fulfill the term of their ('iddah), do not (let the guardians) prevent them from re-marrying their ex-husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms. This instruction is for all of you. Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is purer and more dignifying for you. Allah knows and you do not know."*

KUPI's attempts to form new narratives or reinterpretations based on women's bodily experiences can be found in many verses. One example is the interpretation of the word "*adha*" in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:222. Common *tafsir* usually defines the word as 'dirty' or 'disgusting'. Whereas the word "*adha*" in the figurative use of other Quranic verses means disturbance (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:196), reproach (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:262-264), something annoying (Q.S. Ali-Imran [3]:111), and trouble (Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]:102). The various translations and interpretations of the word "*adha*" become significant when considering women's bodily experiences. Menstruation is a natural part of women's biological condition, closely tied to the menstrual cycle and blood flow. Women's blood in the culture of the Arabian Peninsula society is considered bad and dangerous; even the gaze of women during menstruation by the society is considered taboo, bringing bad luck.

In fact, Rofiah (2020) argues that what women experience in their menstrual flow is painful. It causes various biological impacts on women both before and during the period, including breast pain, body aches, muscle pain in the abdominal area, fatigue, weakness, and the like. Thus, women scholars correct the interpretation of "*adha*" to something that can cause pain (Khalimatunnisa 2021, 1). Similar perspective comes from Quraish Shihab,

who translates the word as 'disturbance' or 'uncomfortable conditions' for women (Ishaq et al. 2025, 3). Shihab does not use 'dirt,' which is widely mentioned in traditional interpretations (Muflihah & Mursyid 2021, 26).

The difference in the choice of meaning affects the way menstruation is viewed. If it is interpreted as dirty or disgusting, women's reproductive state will be perceived as negative, thus, degrading women's humanity. In contrast, if it is understood as a circumstance that causes pain, an empathetic and non-discriminatory attitude towards menstruating women will grow. This attitude will surely alleviate the agony experienced by women (Kodir 2021, 183).

The integration of women's bodily experiences is found in the discussion concerning women's vulnerability in religious-based terrorism and extremism acts. The discourse is in relation to Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]:75,

*"And what is [the matter] with you? You do not fight in the cause of Allah and for oppressed men, women, and children who cry out, 'Our Lord! Take us out of this land of oppressors! Appoint for us a savior, appoint for us a helper, all by Your grace.'"*

The Quran instructs that women must be protected in contexts of terrorism, regardless of whether they are vulnerable, exposed to danger, coerced perpetrators, or affected as victims. Hence, the state is obliged to safeguard women from terrorism and extremism. Moreover, they must be involved in the matters of defending state security, as stated in Q.S. Ali Imran [3]:195, Q.S. al-Maidah [5]:2, and Q.S. al-Taubah [9]:71.

In different discourse, KUPI applies similar approach in addressing the adverse effects of forced marriage on women. For KUPI, it contradicts several verses in the Quran, one of which is Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]:9,

*"And let those (guardians) fear (injustice) as if they had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice."*

KUPI illustrates the impact of coerced marriage on women's bodily experiences when interpreting this verse. Women who do not wish to marry and are forced to have sexual relations with their husbands are prone to bleeding, irritation, and neglect of pregnancies. This attitude results badly in the fulfillment of fetus' nutrition, which eventually will influence the health of the child at birth (KUPI 2023, 147-148).

The interpretation based on woman's perspective is also applied when examining the issue of protecting women's souls from the dangers of pregnancy due to rape cases. God's words in Q.S. Luqman [31]:14 commands gratefulness toward women's reproductive role.

*"And We have commanded people to (honor) their parents. Their mothers bore them through hardship upon hardship, and their weaning takes two years. So be grateful to Me and your parents. To Me is the final return."*

Using this verse, KUPI encourage to help rape victims from the dangers of pregnancy, either by terminating it or continuing it safely and healthily. This verse becomes the basis of safe abortion for rape victims.

Compared to other exegetical works, KUPI's interpretation style is considered unique. *Tafsir* from Ibn Kathir, for example, claims that the aforementioned verse emphasizes the importance of ethics towards parents because it is coupled with the command to glorify Allah. It explicitly commands children to be kind and grateful for mothers' sacrifice. When experiencing pregnancy, mothers went through difficulties along with increasing gestational age. After giving birth, they still need to breastfeed and care for their babies, days and nights. Such endless dedication must definitely be repaid by children by respecting and being compassionate to their parents. Overall, Ibn Kathir's interpretation describes maternal sacrifices in reproduction but does not address women's reproductive rights, unlike KUPI's works.

In different case, KUPI also examines women's protection against the dangers FGC (Female Genital Cutting) without medical supervision. KUPI argues this illegal practice affects women's reproductive system, as well as their physical and psychological conditions. Thus, FGC contradicts the Quranic guidance in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:195,

*"Spend in the way of Allah and do not let your own hands throw you into destruction [by refraining]. And do good, for Allah certainly loves the good-doers."*

Based on those who undergo FGC, the bodily harm suffered by women directly dispute the Quranic command that prohibits plunging oneself into destruction (KUPI 2023, 236-237). Therefore, Islam strongly concerns with protecting life and preservation of health. It once again reminds believers that faith requires responsibility for the well-being of the body given by Allah.

### **Women's Experiences within KUPI's Ethical-Normative Reasoning**

Women's bodily experiences are brought together with KUPI's methodological paradigm. KUPI's interpretive reasoning does not rely on the text completely, but is based on a holistic framework encompassing the source texts (the Quran and hadith). The women's bodily experiences in KUPI's reasoning becomes an epistemic locus in transforming the unjust

reality of women's characteristics towards something that embodies a civilization of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy for all creation). The reality of humans and nature is characterized by KUPI through nine fundamental values derived from the Quran and Hadith, namely divinity, mercy, benefit, equality, harmony, justice, nationality, humanity, and equality. These values aim to reshape how women's bodily autonomy is understood in ethical-normative reasoning.

Women's bodily experiences, such as stigma, marginalization, and subordination of the double burden, must be placed as part of the initial data of human's realities. These human phenomena necessitate transformation efforts guided by the interpretation of the primary sources of knowledge, the Quran and Hadith. We often find society stigmatizes women as seducers and carriers of *fitnah* (lie/tempt/lure). The stigma arises from a misinterpretation of the Quranic verse or hadith. Thus, the approach of KUPI's *tafsir* examines whether it is true that the Quran and hadith position women as slanderers and seducers. It turns out that, based on the perspective of similarity (*mubadalah*), the meaning issued from the text is that both men and women have the possibility of being a temptress or a source of *fitnah* (Ali 1975, 232). Thus, the stigma of seducers that is attached and detrimental to women must be changed by socializing and educating a new narrative against defamation of men and women (Hasyim & Nashrullah 2025, 166).

In an issue of domestic violence against wives, some people, mostly men, consider it normal because it is regarded as an effort to foster and educate women. They rely on Q.S. an-Nisa' [4]:34,

*"Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them (first), (if they persist) do not share their beds, (but if they still persist) then discipline them (gently). But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great."*

Wives who disobey their husbands are regarded as *nusyuz* (rebellion). Hence, people believe that they can be beaten, according to the mainstream exegesis. The question is whether it is true that the verse commands physical violence in marital relationship. Based on the ultimate justice in KUPI's perspective, the phrase which are often associated with "wife beating" should be comprehended as proposing a situational mechanism for resolving domestic

dispute. This mechanism aims to achieve harmony rather than legitimizing violence. At the time the verse was revealed to the Prophet, beating was the only resolution. However, the Quran offered two alternatives: spousal communication and separate sleeping. Therefore, the phrase from that verse should not be understood as 'beating,' but rather how marital conflicts must be resolved. Even, Rofiah (2020, 20) believes that the true meaning of the verse is the prohibition of hitting wives.

For KUPI, women's bodily experiences are not regarded as incidental or marginal. They are the epistemic source that can be used as alternative interpretations of the Quran and hadith. These interpretations are fundamentally in favor of justice for women, confirming that their realities—biological, social, and reproductive—are considered as valid basis for religious reasoning. In this approach, women's bodily experiences must be interpreted in ways that give benefits (*jalb al-masalih*) and avoid harm (*dar'u al-mafasid*). Such protection is not exclusive for women. Religion provides the same guarantees for men, indicating that justice is universal within Islamic teaching (Rofi'ah 2025, 1).

## Conclusion

KUPI places women's bodily experiences as one of the epistemological bases of interpretation, representing the incorporation of *kauniyyah* verses into the *tafsir* process. The experiences accommodate both the biological and social realities of women. The approach employed by KUPI is to integrate women's perspectives and experiences in interpreting the Quranic texts. It begins with problem identification and reflection, and continues with the construction of a transformative exegesis through the re-narration of verse interpretation.

KUPI's decision to utilize women's bodily experiences supports the documentation of women's realities and the transformation of women's knowledge into collective expertise and communal narratives. It thereby legitimizes women's bodily experiences as new and authoritative knowledge in Quranic *tafsir*. By doing so, it provides data to build a gender-just interpretation. KUPI's standard of Quranic exegesis seeks both benefits (*jalb al-masalih*) and avoiding harm (*dar'u al-mafasid*). At the same time, it ensures that women's bodily experiences as an epistemological assertion in religion provide protection not only for women, but also for men, equally.

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