Seminar Pendidikan Agama Islam 2026
UPT Laboratorium Pendidikan Agama Islam
Universitas Negeri Malang

E-ISSN: 2961-8614

Date Received : **04 April 2026**
Date Accepted : **15 July 2026**
Date Published : **15 August 2026**

Sexual Violence in Qur'anic Scholarship: A Systematic Review

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Keywords:

Qur'anic Hermeneutics; Sexual Violence; Islamic Legal Ethics; Feminist Tafsir; Bodily Integrity

ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is discussed in Muslim scholarship through overlapping scriptural, juristic, ethical, and socio-legal categories. This structured literature review revises an initial systematic-review by narrowing the design, clarifying novelty, and synthesizing scholarship on rape classification, Q 4:34, marital coercion, feminist tafsir, and rights-based Islamic ethics. Sources were selected from a verified core corpus of peer-reviewed articles, scholarly monographs, and official primary-text resources, while closed database counts remain reserved for institutional export. The synthesis shows that Qur'anic ethical resources—mercy, non-harm, dignity, mutuality, and protection—do not support sexual coercion. The main scholarly tension lies in how those resources are mediated by tafsir, fiqh categories, marital authority, and institutional practice. Future research should expand Indonesian-language searches and test how mubādalah, maqāṣid, and victim-centered legal reform can strengthen protection in Muslim educational and legal settings.

A. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is not only a criminal or social problem; it is also an interpretive problem when religious language is used to define authority, obedience, harm, consent, and the moral status of victims. In Muslim contexts, the topic cannot be reduced to general violence against women because scholarly debates pass through Qur'anic verses, tafsir traditions, fiqh categories, marriage norms, pastoral authority, and contemporary rights-based vocabulary. Modern human-

rights language identifies sexual violence as a form of gender-based violence involving physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including coercion and threats (OHCHR, 1993). Islamic scholarship, however, also requires attention to how harm is named within Qur'anic ethics and juristic reasoning.

The initial manuscript made a strong normative claim that the Qur'an does not license sexual violence, but the reviewer correctly noted that this claim needed a clearer evidentiary architecture. The revised article therefore separates four layers that were previously blended: Qur'anic moral vocabulary, interpretive mediation, juristic classification, and institutional protection. This layered framework is shown in Figure 1 and used throughout the review. It allows the article to avoid two weak extremes: first, treating the Qur'an, tafsir, and fiqh as identical; second, dismissing inherited Islamic categories as irrelevant to contemporary protection.

Legal-historical scholarship shows that premodern Islamic law condemned coercive sexual violation but did not always organize the issue through the modern concept of autonomous sexual consent. Rape could be discussed as coerced unlawful intercourse, public violence, discretionary punishment, or compensable harm, depending on school, evidence, and legal reasoning (Azam, 2015; Noor, 2010; Kamali, 2019). This classification matters because moral condemnation does not automatically produce victim-centered procedure. If legal categories are poorly translated, victims may still face suspicion, stigma, or inadequate institutional protection.

Marriage and consent form the most difficult conceptual area. Classical discussions of marriage often assumed lawful sexual access within a contract structured by maintenance, gendered authority, and reciprocal duties. Contemporary Islamic ethics asks whether those inherited assumptions can be reconciled with bodily integrity, non-harm, and the refusal of coercion (Ali, 2010; Ali, 2016). The issue is not whether Muslim ethics can condemn cruelty; it is whether the tradition can name coercive sex inside marriage as a violation rather than a private marital dispute.

Qur'an 4:34 remains the most contested textual site because the terms qiwāma, nushūz, and ḍaraba have been read through different models of household order, discipline, and authority. Premodern and modern interpreters do not simply disagree over a dictionary meaning; they disagree over what kind of moral world the verse is allowed to authorize (Chaudhry, 2013; Bauer, 2015; Silvers, 2006). Therefore, any responsible review must neither minimize the verse nor isolate it from wider Qur'anic commitments to mercy, justice, and non-oppression.

Feminist Qur'anic hermeneutics has been central in reopening these debates. Wadud emphasizes a woman-centered rereading of the sacred text, Barlas critiques patriarchal interpretation, Hidayatullah identifies the methodological edges of feminist exegesis, and Mir-Hosseini connects equality claims to legal reform (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2019; Hidayatullah, 2014). This literature does not merely add a modern ideology to the Qur'an; it asks which interpretive habits have allowed male authority to appear as divine intent.

The novelty of the revised manuscript lies in its four-layer synthesis. It does not present another general review of women in Islam, another isolated discussion of Q 4:34, or a legal note on rape classification. Instead, it connects sexual violation jurisprudence, contested exegesis of marital hierarchy, feminist hermeneutics, and the practical need for institutional protection. Figure 1 is cited here because the framework converts the reviewer's criticism into the article's central contribution: sexual violence is best analyzed as a failure that can occur at the ethical, interpretive, juridical, or institutional layer.

This article asks one primary question: how has scholarship interpreted sexual violence in relation to the Qur'an, Qur'an-derived legal reasoning, and gender-ethical hermeneutics? The secondary questions are: which concepts are most frequently invoked; how do scholars classify rape, marital coercion, and domestic/sexual harm; how is Q 4:34 handled; and what gaps remain for Indonesian Islamic studies, especially in relation to mubādalah, maqāṣid, and victim-centered protection.

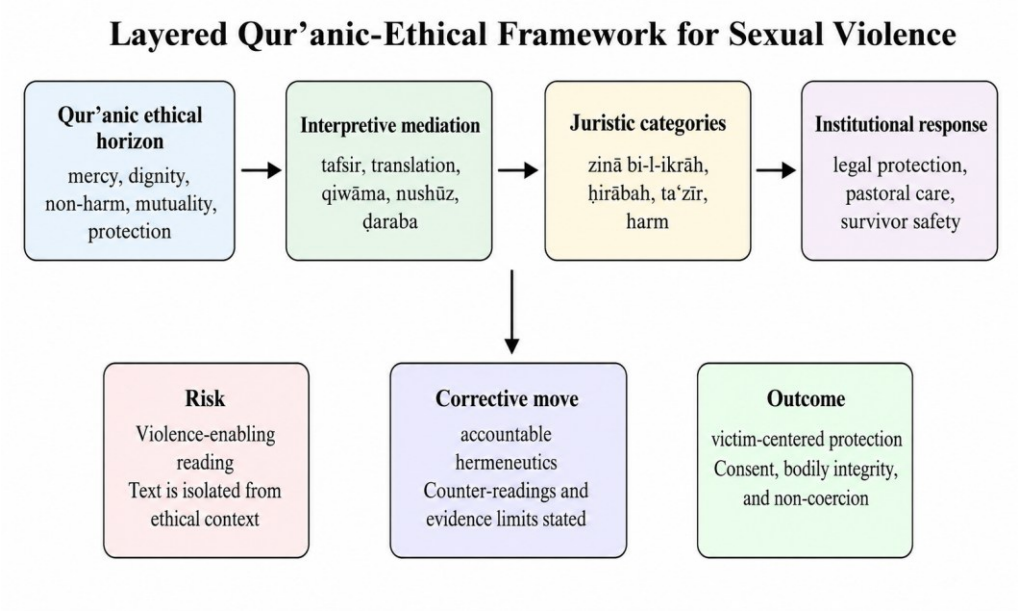


Figure 1. Layered Qur'anic-ethical framework for synthesizing scholarship on sexual violence.

B. METHOD

Following the reviewer's methodological concern, this revised manuscript no longer overclaims a completed database-final PRISMA review. It is framed as a structured integrative literature review with systematic search logic, transparent eligibility criteria, and narrative synthesis. This design is more suitable for a corpus composed of monographs, tafsir studies, legal-doctrinal scholarship, feminist hermeneutics, and socio-legal analysis than a conventional intervention-effect SLR (Grant & Booth, 2009; Campbell et al., 2020).

The review was guided by PRISMA-informed and PRISMA-S principles. Because institutional export from Scopus, Web of Science, ATLA Religion Database, Index Islamicus, JSTOR, and HeinOnline was not available inside the drafting environment, the article avoids final numerical

PRISMA claims and reports the search workflow as a reproducibility plan. This correction directly addresses the reviewer's concern that provisional counts should not be presented as completed screening results (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Table 1. Review design and eligibility framework.

Element	Decision	Rationale
Review design	Structured integrative literature review with systematic search logic	Appropriate for interpretive, doctrinal, and socio-legal scholarship where effect-size synthesis is impossible.
Population/domain	Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic legal thought, Muslim gender ethics, and scholarship on sexual violence	Captures textual, juristic, ethical, and institutional pathways.
Phenomenon	Sexual violence, rape, coercion, forced sex, marital discipline, bodily harm, and violence-enabling interpretation	Keeps the review focused on sexualized harm rather than general gender discourse.
Eligible sources	Peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, edited chapters, official primary-text resources	Islamic studies relies heavily on monographs and chapters as well as journals.
Excluded sources	Blogs, sermons, polemical websites, non-scholarly summaries, and works without Qur'anic or Islamic legal connection	Protects the review from unverified or advocacy-only claims.
Synthesis method	Thematic synthesis by source type, concept, interpretive method, and claim strength	Allows comparison without falsely treating all sources as equivalent empirical evidence.

Source: Authors' synthesis based on revised review protocol.

Search terms were organized into three blocks: sexual-violence terms, Qur'anic/exegetical terms, and Islamic-law or gender-ethics terms. The master string was: ("sexual violence" OR rape OR "marital rape" OR coercion OR "forced sex" OR "domestic violence" OR "zinā bi-l-ikrāh") AND ("Qur'an" OR Quran OR tafsir OR exegesis OR "Q 4:34" OR "Surah al-Nisa" OR "Q 24:33") AND (Islam* OR sharia OR fiqh OR "Islamic law" OR "Islamic ethics" OR "feminist hermeneutics" OR qiwāma OR nushūz OR ḍaraba). Indonesian supplementary terms were: kekerasan seksual, perkosaan, pemaksaan seksual, tafsir, Al-Qur'an, hukum Islam, mubādalah, maqāṣid, and keadilan gender. The workflow is summarized in Figure 3.

Quality appraisal was adapted to source type. Legal-historical and doctrinal works were assessed for source transparency, engagement with primary texts, treatment of counter-evidence, and discipline between evidence and normative claim. Hermeneutical works were assessed for interpretive method, acknowledgement of textual difficulty, and reflexivity about reader location. Socio-legal sources were assessed for jurisdictional context and institutional relevance. Table 1 is cited again because it clarifies why the review's design was changed from an overclaimed SLR to a more defensible structured review.

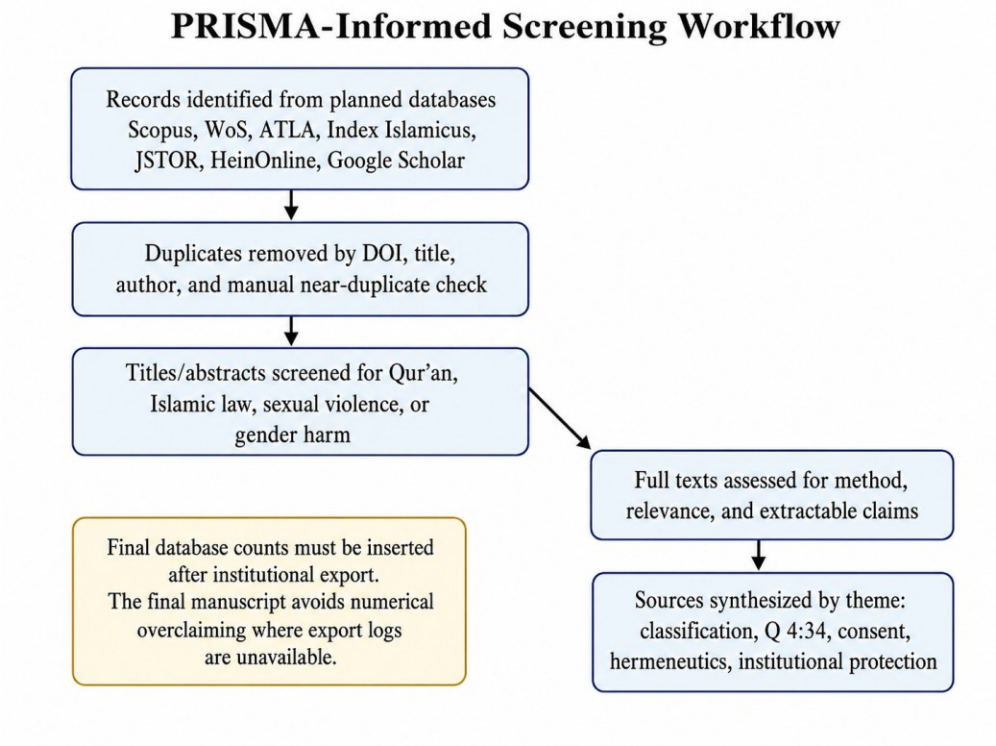


Figure 2. PRISMA-informed screening workflow for the structured review.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Source characteristics and evidence structure

The revised corpus is organized around five evidence clusters rather than a single undifferentiated list. This responds to the reviewer's criticism that empirical studies, tafsir, monographs, and legal theory were previously blended as if they carried identical evidentiary weight. Table 2 shows the revised structure: each source is linked to a main contribution and to the layer of the framework in Figure 1.

Table 2. Evidence clusters used in the revised synthesis.

Cluster	Key sources	Core contribution	Claim strength
Rape and coercion in Islamic law	Azam (2015); Noor (2010); Kamali (2019)	Clarifies the distinction between moral condemnation, evidentiary proof, and legal classification through zinā, ḥirābah, taʿzīr, and harm.	High for category mapping; moderate for modern application.
Q 4:34 and marital discipline	Chaudhry (2010, 2013); Bauer (2006, 2015); Ghafournia (2017); Silvers (2006)	Maps qiwāma, nushūz, and ḍaraba as contested terms that can either enable hierarchy or be ethically constrained.	High for centrality; contested for normative conclusion.
Marriage, consent, and bodily integrity	Ali (2010, 2016); Hajjar (2004)	Shows tension between lawful sexual access in classical contract logic and modern consent-centered protection.	Moderate; needs more marital-rape-specific Islamic legal work.
Feminist and maqāṣid-oriented hermeneutics	Wadud (1999); Barlas (2019); Hidayatullah (2014); Mir-Hosseini (2006); Al-Sharmani (2014); Riyani (2017)	Foregrounds gender justice, reader location, patriarchal interpretive authority, and national/transnational reform.	High for hermeneutical critique; moderate for legal institutionalization.
Methodological and reporting sources	Grant & Booth (2009); Page et al. (2021); Rethlefsen et al. (2021);	Supports the revised choice of structured integrative review	High for methodological correction.

	Campbell et al. (2020)	and transparent search reporting.	

Source: Authors' extraction and thematic classification.

2. Rape classification: condemnation is not the same as protection

The strongest legal-historical finding is that Islamic law contains categories for condemning coercive sexual violation, but these categories do not map neatly onto modern rape law. When rape is described as coerced zinā, the victim's lack of liability is central, but the legal architecture still depends on zinā-related evidence and classification. When rape is analogized to ḥirābah, it becomes more visibly a violent public harm. When it is treated under taʿzīr, evidentiary flexibility may be greater, but judicial discretion becomes more important (Azam, 2015; Noor, 2010; Kamali, 2019).

This finding changes the core argument of the article. The issue is not whether Islamic law ever condemned rape; it did. The issue is whether available categories reliably protect victims from suspicion, procedural burden, and institutional neglect. Table 2 is important here because it separates category mapping from ethical and institutional implications. The revised argument is therefore more precise: Islamic legal resources against coercion exist, but victim-centered protection depends on how those resources are translated into procedure.

3. Q 4:34: hierarchy, harm, and interpretive accountability

The second major finding is that Q 4:34 remains the review's central hermeneutical pressure point. The terms qiwāma, nushūz, and ḍaraba do not merely raise lexical problems; they raise institutional problems because interpretations of household authority can shape sermons, marriage counseling, judicial reasoning, and everyday moral expectations. Premodern exegesis often accepted a hierarchical household model, while modern gender-egalitarian scholarship asks whether that model can be reconciled with Qur'anic values of mercy, justice, and non-harm (Chaudhry, 2013; Bauer, 2015).

The literature reveals several interpretive strategies. Some readings retain ḍaraba but restrict it ethically and legally; some seek non-violent semantic alternatives; some argue that the verse must be read through the total Qur'anic moral horizon; and others emphasize that the verse creates a genuine ethical difficulty that cannot be erased by translation alone (Ghafournia, 2017; Dunn & Kellison, 2010; Silvers, 2006). Figure 1 is cited again because it shows why this debate must pass through the interpretive layer before any legal or institutional claim is made.

The revised manuscript therefore avoids apologetic minimization. A credible Qur'anic response to sexual violence cannot say merely that Islam is merciful and then leave violence-enabling readings unexamined. It must ask which interpretive authorities, linguistic choices, and institutional practices have made coercion appear religiously tolerable. This is where Figure 2 also matters: it identifies Q 4:34 as a high-density but high-contestation cluster, requiring careful claim discipline rather than a single harmonizing conclusion.

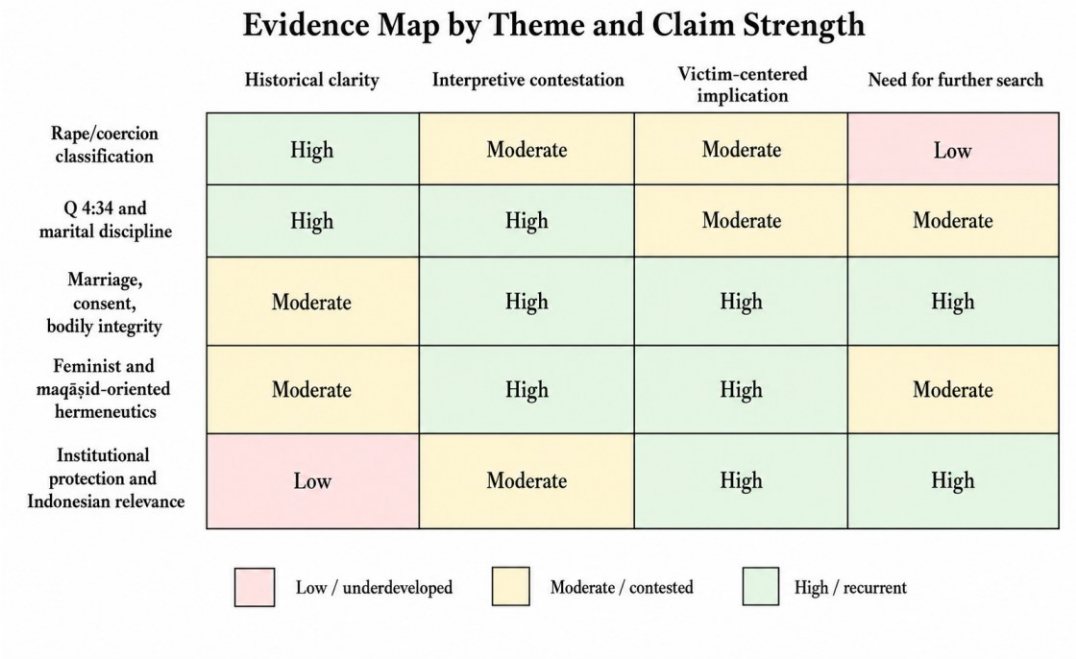


Figure 3. Evidence map by theme and claim strength.

4. Marital coercion and consent as the least resolved issue

The reviewer noted that marital rape and consent were under-theorized in the first draft. The revised synthesis treats them as the least resolved conceptual area. Classical marriage law often connected sexual access to contract, maintenance, and gendered duties, whereas contemporary ethics treats sexual coercion as a violation of bodily integrity and moral agency. The gap is not only legal; it is conceptual (Ali, 2010; Ali, 2016).

A victim-centered Islamic framework must therefore move beyond the question of whether marriage creates lawful sexual availability. It must ask whether coercion, fear, injury, humiliation, or refusal can invalidate any claim to moral entitlement. Here the principles of non-harm, mercy, mutuality, and accountability become decisive. The review does not claim that modern consent language appears fully formed in classical sources. It claims that contemporary Islamic legal ethics can use its own resources to reject coercive entitlement.

This discussion also has educational relevance for Islamic institutions. If sexual violence is framed only as illicit sex outside marriage, students may miss the problem of coercion inside families, engagements, schools, and religious communities. If it is framed through bodily integrity, amanah, non-harm, and mutual dignity, the discourse becomes more protective without abandoning Qur'anic vocabulary.

5. Feminist hermeneutics and Indonesian relevance

Feminist hermeneutics provides the strongest methodological correction to patriarchal interpretive authority. Wadud's rereading emphasizes textual wholeness and women's agency; Barlas critiques the conflation of patriarchy with divine speech; Hidayatullah warns that feminist

readers must still face textual difficulty; and Mir-Hosseini links equality claims to Muslim legal reform (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2019; Hidayatullah, 2014).

This field is also relevant for Indonesian Islamic studies. Indonesian scholarship has engaged feminist Qur'anic method, including analysis of Amina Wadud's hermeneutics (Riyani, 2017). The revised review adds Indonesian search terms and recommends future screening in Garuda, Moraref, Neliti, SINTA-indexed journals, and university repositories. This correction addresses the reviewer's concern that Indonesian scholarship was previously acknowledged but not integrated.

The Indonesian contribution should not be limited to adding local references. It can become a conceptual contribution if the final study connects Qur'anic anti-coercion ethics with mubādalah, maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, and victim-centered institutional protection in Islamic education. Figure 3 is cited here because the evidence map marks Indonesian relevance as a high-priority area for additional searching rather than a completed claim.

Table 3. Revision matrix responding to the review report.

Problem identified by reviewer	Revision applied	Resulting improvement
Novelty was descriptive	Developed a four-layer framework: Qur'anic ethics, interpretation, juristic category, institutional protection.	Novelty becomes analytical and visible in Figure 1.
Review design was misclassified	Reframed as structured integrative review with systematic search logic.	Avoids false completed-SLR claims while preserving review rigor.
Evidence types were blended	Separated sources into legal-historical, exegetical, feminist-hermeneutical, socio-legal, and methodological clusters.	Improves analytical validity and source weighting.
Q 4:34 treatment lacked tension	Expanded qiwāma, nushūz, ḍaraba, hierarchy, harm, and ethical difficulty.	Prevents apologetic and polemical overreach.
Marital rape was under-theorized	Positioned marital coercion as the least resolved category between classical contract logic and modern bodily integrity.	Strengthens the paper's central contribution.
Indonesian scholarship was weak	Added Indonesian search strategy and proposed mubādalah/maqāṣid integration.	Improves relevance for Indonesian Islamic studies.

Source: Authors' revision based on reviewer comments.

6. Synthesis and implications

The overall synthesis is balanced. The Qur'anic ethical horizon provides strong resources for rejecting sexual coercion through concepts of dignity, non-harm, compassion, and moral accountability. Yet those resources do not automatically operate unless interpreters and institutions translate them responsibly. Figure 1 and Table 3 show the revised article's main conceptual move: sexual violence becomes possible not because the ethical horizon is empty, but because ethical principles may be weakened at the interpretive, juristic, or institutional layer.

For Islamic education, the implication is direct. Teaching about sexual violence should not rely only on moral warning or legal prohibition. It should train students to distinguish coercion from consent, authority from domination, marriage from entitlement, and interpretation from divine authorization. This approach is compatible with religious education because it uses Qur'anic moral language while challenging violence-enabling readings.

For legal and pastoral institutions, the review suggests a victim-centered framework. Religious counselors, teachers, and legal actors should avoid advising victims to preserve family harmony at the cost of bodily safety. They should also avoid conflating rape with consensual sexual misconduct. Table 2 is cited again because it shows why doctrinal, ethical, and institutional literatures must work together rather than in isolation.

The main limitation is that a final database-complete review still requires institutional searching and export logs. This manuscript is final as a revised conference-style review article, but a journal submission claiming full PRISMA completion should still add database counts, full-text retrieval logs, dual-reviewer decisions, and complete Indonesian-language screening. This limitation is not hidden; it is incorporated into the review's methodological humility.

D. CONCLUSION

This revised structured review concludes that sexual violence in Qur'anic scholarship must be analyzed through layered mediation: Qur'anic ethical resources, interpretive traditions, juristic classifications, and institutional responses. The evidence does not support a Qur'anic ethic that licenses sexual coercion. However, the translation of Qur'anic values into protective law, education, and pastoral practice remains uneven. Rape classification in Islamic law shows that coercive sexual violation was morally and legally recognized, but proof and category problems could weaken victim protection. Q 4:34 remains the most contested site because its interpretation can either reinforce hierarchy or be ethically constrained by mercy, non-harm, and mutual dignity. Marital coercion is the least resolved problem and requires deeper Islamic legal-ethical development around consent and bodily integrity. For Indonesian Islamic education, future work should integrate feminist tafsir, mubādalah, maqāṣid, and victim-centered protection so that religious discourse functions as a safeguard against sexual violence rather than a language of silence or normalization.

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