

Rereading Hadith on Domestic Violence: A Hermeneutical Analysis of Contemporary Interpretations

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Abstract

Domestic violence, locally known as Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga (KDRT), continues to affect Muslim households in Indonesia and elsewhere, with some practitioners drawing on selective readings of Prophetic hadith to justify or minimize such conduct. This article employs a qualitative library-based methodology to analyze hadith traditions related to spousal relations through the lens of modern hermeneutical theory. Drawing on the hermeneutics of Gadamer, the double-movement approach of Fazlur Rahman, the critical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, and the maqasid al-shari'ah framework, the study argues that authentic hadith consistently reflect a prophetic ethos of mercy, dignified treatment, and the prohibition of violence against women. Interpretations that appear to permit disciplinary striking are examined against their textual, historical, and jurisprudential contexts and shown to be either contextually constrained or methodologically questionable. The study further demonstrates that patriarchal cultural assumptions have often shaped the transmission and reception of hadith-based rulings in ways that obscure the moral trajectory of Islamic law toward the protection of women's dignity and bodily integrity. A responsible contemporary hermeneutics of hadith, the article concludes, must foreground the prophetic model of non-violence, the objectives of Islamic law, and the imperative of protecting victims as the primary frame for reading ambiguous texts.

Keywords: Hadith hermeneutics; domestic violence; maqasid al-shari'ah; patriarchy; Islamic feminism; fusion of horizons.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence constitutes one of the most persistent and deeply contested social problems confronting Muslim communities worldwide. In Indonesia, the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) recorded 11,105 cases of domestic violence in 2023 alone, representing a 60 percent increase from the previous year. This figure almost certainly underestimates the true scope of the problem given the well-documented barriers to reporting that include economic dependence on the abuser, social stigma, fear of further violence, and the cultural expectation that marital conflicts should remain within the private domain of the family.

What renders this problem particularly complex within Muslim contexts is the role that religious texts play in shaping attitudes toward marital authority and spousal discipline. Preliminary field observation in several districts of West Java found a pronounced polarization

among religious leaders and Muslim community members regarding the interpretation of hadith that address gender relations within marriage. On one side, there are those who cite authenticated traditions as an absolute prohibition on any form of violence against women. On the other, there are those who appeal to certain Quranic verses and hadith to justify what they describe as limited disciplinary authority of husbands over disobedient wives. This interpretive divide is not merely academic; it has direct consequences for the safety, dignity, and legal protection of women who experience violence in the domestic sphere.

The problem this article addresses is therefore not simply a legal or social one but is fundamentally hermeneutical. The way practitioners, clergy, and scholars interpret hadith determines how communities understand the boundaries of permissible conduct within marriage, how victims of violence assess their own situation in relation to religious obligation, and how legal and social institutions frame their interventions. A hermeneutically uninformed reading of hadith on spousal relations carries the risk of providing theological cover for practices that Islamic law, read comprehensively, does not and cannot sanction.

Despite the growing scholarship on gender and Islam in Indonesia and the broader Muslim world, there remains a notable gap in the literature. Most existing studies either confine themselves to a textual analysis of specific legal opinions without engaging contemporary hermeneutical theory, or they adopt feminist critique without sufficiently attending to the internal methodological resources of hadith scholarship itself. The present study aims to bridge this gap by bringing the tools of modern hermeneutics into conversation with classical hadith methodology in order to produce an interpretation that is both methodologically rigorous and ethically responsive to the needs of victims.

The central question guiding this study is as follows. How can a hermeneutically informed reading of hadith related to domestic violence produce an interpretation that is faithful to the prophetic tradition while also being adequate to the demands of justice, human dignity, and the protection of vulnerable persons in contemporary Muslim societies? Answering this question requires, first, mapping the major hadith traditions relevant to domestic violence; second, examining the theoretical resources that hermeneutics offers for interpreting these traditions; third, situating the interpretive problem within the socio-historical context of patriarchal influence on hadith transmission and reception; and fourth, drawing these threads together into a constructive interpretive framework grounded in the objectives of Islamic law.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research (*studi pustaka*). Rather than generating new empirical data through fieldwork, the study systematically examines and synthesizes existing primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include canonical hadith collections such as Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abi Dawud, and Sunan Ibn Majah, along with classical commentaries by scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Imam al-Nawawi, and Imam al-Suyuthi. Secondary sources encompass contemporary scholarship in hermeneutical theory, Islamic legal philosophy, gender studies in Islam, and Indonesian legal frameworks for the protection of domestic violence victims.

The analytical approach integrates four methodological dimensions. The first is classical hadith criticism, which involves evaluating the chain of transmission (isnad) and the textual content (matan) of relevant hadith according to established criteria of hadith sciences. The second is hermeneutical analysis, drawing primarily on Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory, and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion to examine how contextual factors shape interpretation. The third is maqasid al-shari'ah analysis, which situates individual hadith within the overarching objectives of Islamic law, namely the protection of life, intellect, lineage, property, and human dignity. The fourth is contextual historicization, which examines the socio-cultural conditions of seventh-century Arabia and their relationship to the content and subsequent interpretation of hadith on spousal relations.

The selection of hadith for analysis was guided by their prominence in contemporary debates about domestic violence in Muslim communities, their frequency of citation in both permissive and prohibitive interpretations, and their methodological interest as test cases for hermeneutical analysis. Hadith were examined not in isolation but in relation to the broader corpus of prophetic traditions on family life, the Quranic principles that frame spousal relations, and the documented personal conduct of the Prophet Muhammad.

This study is fully aware of the limitations of a library-based approach. It does not claim to capture the full diversity of interpretive practice across Muslim communities in Indonesia or elsewhere, nor does it make empirical claims about how individual believers apply religious guidance to domestic situations. What it does offer is a methodologically grounded interpretive framework that can serve as a resource for scholars, religious leaders, educators, and policymakers who engage with these questions in their respective contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hadith Foundations for the Prohibition of Domestic Violence

The most direct hadith testimony on the question of domestic violence is the well-known tradition reported by Aisha through Hisham ibn Urwah, recorded in Sunan Abi Dawud, which states that the Prophet Muhammad never struck anything with his hand, not a woman and not a servant, except in the cause of God in jihad. This report carries strong isnad quality because it is transmitted through a highly reliable chain of narrators and its content aligns consistently with other authenticated accounts of the Prophet's personal conduct within his household. The methodological significance of this hadith is substantial. In the science of hadith, the Prophet's personal actions (fi'l al-nabi) possess normative authority alongside his explicit verbal instructions. The fact that this action-based hadith depicts a consistent lifetime practice rather than a single incident strengthens its normative weight considerably.

A second tradition, recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari, addresses the moral quality of striking one's wife. The Prophet stated that one should not strike his wife as a slave is struck and then lie with her at the end of the day. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in his authoritative commentary Fath al-Bari, explains that this hadith highlights the fundamental incompatibility between violence and the purpose of marriage, which Islamic ethics grounds in tenderness, intimacy, and shared life. The rhetorical structure of the hadith, which places the act of striking adjacent to the act

of marital intimacy in a way that renders them mutually incoherent, signals that the Prophet understood marital violence as a categorical contradiction of what marriage is meant to be.

The Prophet's farewell sermon (khutbat al-wada'), preserved in multiple hadith collections with strong chains, contains an explicit instruction to treat women with care and dignity, framing women as a trust (amanah) placed in the husband's custody under the authority of God. This framing is theologically significant because it places the protection of women not within the sphere of human discretion but within the domain of divine accountability. A husband who harms his wife violates not merely a social norm but a sacred covenant.

Taken together, these hadith constitute a coherent prophetic voice that consistently orients toward non-violence, dignity, and mutual care as the governing principles of marital life. Before turning to the hadith that contemporary debates cite as potentially permissive of disciplinary conduct, it is important to establish this baseline clearly. The methodological implication is that any interpretation of potentially permissive texts must be evaluated against the dominant prophetic norm of non-violence rather than allowed to function as a free-standing license.

Problematic Hadith and Their Critical Evaluation

The most contested hadith in discussions of domestic violence concern the concept of disciplinary authority derived from the Quranic verse 4:34 of Surah al-Nisa, which speaks of nushuz (marital discord) and the graduated responses available to a husband. While the Quranic text is not itself a hadith, a number of prophetic traditions have been read in conjunction with it to construct a framework for legitimate disciplinary action. Critical examination of these traditions requires attention both to their transmission quality and to the conditions their classical interpreters actually attached to them.

Classical jurists who acknowledged any form of permissible striking (darb) in the marital context attached conditions so stringent that the action was effectively emptied of practical content. The striking must not cause physical pain, must not leave any mark, must not be directed at the face, and must be purely symbolic. Imam al-Nawawi and Ibn Hajar both note that many scholars considered any actual striking impermissible under these conditions, preferring instead that the verse be understood as a description of a historical practice that Islam was progressively constraining. The practical impossibility of striking that is simultaneously non-painful and non-marking was noted by several scholars as effectively prohibiting the act while technically maintaining a formal textual category for it.

A number of hadith that appear in popular literature to support permissive interpretations also carry significant problems at the level of isnad. Some transmit through chains containing narrators rated as weak (da'if) in reliability, others contain interruptions in the chain (inqita'), and some have been categorized by hadith critics as fabricated (mawdu') in response to the social pressures of particular periods. The methodology of hadith criticism requires that weak traditions not be used to establish new legal rulings, particularly rulings that override the strong body of authenticated traditions pointing in the opposite direction. Where

conflicting traditions exist, the principle of preferential weighting (*tarjih*) favors the stronger and more numerous tradition, which in this case is the body of hadith prohibiting violence.

In addition to *isnad* analysis, the concept of *matan* criticism (*naqd al-matan*) is relevant here. A hadith whose content contradicts the general spirit of the Prophet's well-documented conduct, or whose application would undermine a fundamental objective of Islamic law, is subject to challenge at the level of content even if its formal chain is intact. Several hadith scholars have applied this criterion to traditions that appear to endorse unlimited husbandly authority, arguing that their content is inconsistent with the broader pattern of the Prophet's behavior and with the Quranic declaration of mutual obligation and kind treatment (*mu'ashara bi-l-ma'ruf*).

Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons in Hadith Interpretation

Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons provides a productive framework for understanding why the same hadith texts have generated such different interpretations across historical periods and social contexts. Gadamer argues in *Truth and Method* that understanding is never a neutral act of extracting a fixed meaning from a static text. Rather, every reader approaches a text from within a historically conditioned horizon that includes assumptions, values, social structures, and ways of seeing that the reader does not always recognize as assumptions but experiences as simply the way things are (Gadamer, 2004). Understanding occurs when the reader's horizon enters into dialogue with the horizon of the text, and genuine understanding involves a transformation of the reader's prior assumptions rather than mere confirmation of them.

Applied to hadith interpretation, this framework illuminates a crucial dynamic. The classical commentators who produced the dominant interpretations of hadith on spousal relations lived within societies organized around strong patriarchal assumptions about male authority, female dependence, and the naturalness of hierarchical gender relations. These assumptions formed part of their interpretive horizon in ways they did not necessarily recognize as assumptions. When they encountered hadith texts that mentioned disciplinary authority, they read those texts through a horizon that made such authority seem obvious and natural. The result was an interpretation that reinforced existing social arrangements rather than challenging them.

Gadamer's theory does not imply that such interpretations were dishonest or intellectually deficient. It suggests rather that they were historically situated and that the passage of time and the transformation of social horizons creates both the need and the opportunity for renewed interpretation. Contemporary readers approach the same hadith texts from a horizon shaped by very different assumptions, including commitment to the equal dignity of all persons, awareness of the psychological and physical damage caused by domestic violence, and recognition of the structural power imbalances that make violence in domestic settings qualitatively different from conflict between equals. The fusion of this contemporary horizon with the horizon of the prophetic texts, conducted responsibly and with attention to the full body of relevant traditions, generates an interpretive result that takes seriously both the text and the moral demands of the present.

A critical qualification is necessary here. Gadamer's hermeneutics does not entail that all interpretations are equally valid or that the meaning of a text is entirely determined by the reader's horizon. Gadamer himself insisted that dialogue with a text involves being corrected by it, that genuine understanding requires openness to what the text says against what we expect it to say. In the context of hadith interpretation, this means that the hermeneutical approach is not a license for reading into the texts whatever contemporary sensibilities prefer, but a method for taking both the texts and their contemporary context with equal seriousness. The strength of the anti-violence interpretation lies precisely in the fact that it is not simply imposed on the texts but emerges from careful attention to the full body of prophetic tradition, including the documented personal conduct of the Prophet.

Fazlur Rahman and the Double-Movement Approach

Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory, developed in *Islam and Modernity*, offers a complementary methodological resource. Rahman argues that faithful interpretation of prophetic texts requires two movements. The first moves from the contemporary situation backward to the original context of the text in order to understand the moral purposes that the text was intended to serve. The second moves forward from those moral purposes to the contemporary situation in order to determine how those purposes can best be realized in a changed social context (Rahman, 1982).

Applying this method to hadith on spousal relations, the first movement requires understanding the social context of seventh-century Arabia. The pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula was characterized by practices of extreme violence against women, including female infanticide, unlimited polygamy without conditions, and forms of marital control that left women entirely without legal recourse. Islamic revelation arrived in this context not as a wholesale endorsement of existing practices but as a gradual reform movement that progressively restricted and ultimately aimed to eliminate practices that degraded human dignity. The measures introduced in the Quran and the Sunnah, including restrictions on polygamy, the establishment of the right to divorce for women (*khul'*), and the strong prophetic condemnation of harsh treatment, were understood by early Muslim scholars as steps along a trajectory of reform rather than as final and unchangeable social arrangements.

The second movement then asks what the moral purposes of this trajectory demand in the contemporary context. If the Prophet's intent was to move Arabian society away from violence toward dignity and mercy in marital relations, then the appropriate contemporary application of that intent is to apply, not merely a textual literalism, but the moral logic that animated the prophetic reform. In a contemporary context equipped with an understanding of the severe and lasting psychological harm caused by domestic violence, with legal frameworks that criminalize such conduct, and with social institutions capable of providing protection and support to victims, the prophetic moral trajectory points clearly toward the full protection of women from violence of any kind.

Rahman's approach also helps explain why it is methodologically inadequate to cite the seventh-century Arabian context as a justification for permitting in the present what was merely restricted in the past. The principle that Islam was progressively reforming social

practices implies that the direction of travel matters as much as any particular point along the way. A traveler who stops at a waystation and refuses to continue to the destination has misunderstood the journey.

Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Paul Ricoeur's concept of the hermeneutics of suspicion adds a further dimension to the analysis by directing attention to the ideological interests that can become embedded in interpretive traditions. Ricoeur argues in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* that texts are not neutral objects but are always situated within power relations and that the interpretation of texts can serve to legitimate or naturalize those power relations in ways that benefit certain groups at the expense of others (Ricoeur, 1981). A hermeneutics of suspicion does not reject the authority of texts but asks critical questions about how particular interpretations came to be dominant, whose interests they serve, and what alternative readings they have suppressed.

Applied to hadith interpretation on domestic violence, a hermeneutics of suspicion invites the question of why certain permissive interpretations became so prominent in classical jurisprudence. Sylvia Walby's sociological analysis of patriarchy describes how social systems organized around male dominance generate cultural and religious justifications for that dominance, constructing what was a social arrangement as though it were a natural or divinely ordained order (Walby, 1990). In the context of hadith scholarship, this means that the social dominance of male scholars in the institutions of Islamic learning during the classical period may have shaped not only how hadith were interpreted but also which hadith were emphasized, which transmitters were considered reliable, and which legal conclusions were treated as self-evident.

Josef Bleicher's account of contemporary hermeneutics notes that critical hermeneutics does not lead to the conclusion that all interpretation is ideologically compromised but rather demands that interpreters take responsibility for examining their own pre-understandings and their social context (Bleicher, 1980). In the case of hadith on spousal relations, this means that contemporary interpreters must critically examine the degree to which received interpretations reflect genuine prophetic teaching and the degree to which they reflect the projection of patriarchal assumptions onto the text. This is not a claim that classical scholars acted in bad faith; it is a recognition that all interpreters, however sincere, bring horizons that are shaped by their social location.

The hermeneutics of suspicion does not end in deconstruction but calls for reconstruction. Having identified the ideological investments embedded in certain interpretations, the task is to return to the texts with fresh eyes and ask what they say when read without those investments. As the preceding analysis suggests, the result of such a reading is not a set of texts that are ambiguous or permissive with respect to violence, but a corpus of prophetic tradition whose overall orientation is consistently and strongly toward the protection of women's dignity and the prohibition of violence.

Maqasid al-Shari'ah as an Interpretive Framework for Domestic Violence

The maqasid al-shari'ah framework, developed systematically by al-Ghazali and refined by al-Shatibi, identifies the fundamental objectives of Islamic law as the protection of life (hifz al-nafs), intellect (hifz al-'aql), lineage (hifz al-nasl), property (hifz al-mal), and religion (hifz al-din). Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur extended this framework to include the protection of human dignity and equality (hifz al-'ird) as a core objective (Ibn Ashur, 2001). This framework has profound implications for the interpretation of hadith on domestic violence.

If the protection of life and human dignity are fundamental objectives of Islamic law, then any interpretation of specific hadith that effectively permits systematic harm to life and dignity is in conflict with the overarching purpose of the law. The principle of *la darar wa la dirar*, that harm is neither to be inflicted nor to be reciprocated, is among the most foundational maxims of Islamic jurisprudence and has the status of an established legal axiom (*qa'ida fiqhiyya*). Domestic violence, which causes documented physical harm, severe psychological trauma, and in many cases long-term damage to the mental health and functioning of victims, falls squarely within the category of harm (*darar*) that the law exists to prevent.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi argues that a hadith interpretation must be considered flawed (*ghalat*) if its practical application consistently produces outcomes that contradict the fundamental purposes of Islamic law (al-Qaradawi, 2000). The application of permissive interpretations of hadith on spousal discipline has demonstrably contributed to outcomes including physical injury, psychological trauma, the destruction of family stability, and the marginalization of women from social and religious life. These outcomes are inconsistent not only with the protection of life and dignity but with the Quranic vision of marriage as a bond of tranquility (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*rahmah*). The maqasid framework therefore provides an internal Islamic basis for concluding that permissive interpretations, regardless of their formal textual arguments, fail as legal reasoning because they subvert the purposes they are supposed to serve.

Abdullah Saeed's distinction between fundamental values and context-bound instructions offers a complementary approach. Saeed argues that Islamic texts embody both enduring moral principles that are binding in all contexts and contextually specific instructions that were addressed to particular circumstances and may require reinterpretation as circumstances change (Saeed, 2006). Applied to hadith on spousal relations, the fundamental value is the equal dignity of all human persons and the imperative of mercy and justice in all relationships. The context-bound instructions reflect the specific social circumstances of seventh-century Arabia and must be understood in relation to those circumstances rather than extracted from them and applied without modification to entirely different social realities.

Classical Hadith Methodology and Its Relevance to the KDRT Debate

Any serious engagement with hadith on domestic violence must be grounded in the established sciences of hadith evaluation. Classical Muslim scholars developed over several centuries a sophisticated methodology for assessing the reliability of prophetic reports, encompassing the evaluation of chains of transmission (*ilm al-rijal* and *ilm al-isnad*) as well as the critical examination of textual content (*naqd al-matan*). Understanding how these

methodological tools apply to the contested hadith is essential for avoiding both uncritical acceptance and uncritical rejection of the relevant traditions.

The science of rijal criticism produced detailed biographical assessments of hadith transmitters organized by their level of reliability, memory accuracy, moral integrity, and consistency with other transmitters. Transmitters were graded from the highest level of trustworthiness (*thiqa*) through various intermediate grades to the level of unreliability (*matruk* or *mawdu'*). The authentication of a hadith requires that every link in the chain of transmission meets an acceptable standard of reliability. Where a chain contains a transmitter assessed as weak (*da'if*) in memory or integrity, the hadith it transmits carries a corresponding reduction in probative force. Chains with multiple independent transmitters (*tawatur*) enjoy the highest epistemic status, while traditions transmitted through a single chain (*ahad*) require additional scrutiny.

The methodology of *matan* criticism, while less systematically developed than *isnad* criticism in classical scholarship, nonetheless produced important criteria for evaluating hadith content. A tradition whose content contradicts a well-established Quranic principle, whose application would nullify a stronger and more numerous body of traditions, or whose narrative structure exhibits signs of later fabrication is subject to challenge on textual grounds even when its formal chain appears sound. The criterion of consistency with Quran (*muwafaqat al-kitab*) is particularly important because the Quran's consistent framing of spousal relations in terms of mutual kindness, *sakinah*, and *rahmah* provides a textual standard against which purportedly permissive hadith must be evaluated.

Ibn al-Salah's classical taxonomy of hadith quality, from *sahih* through *hasan* to *da'if* and *mawdu'*, continues to provide the basic organizational framework for contemporary hadith evaluation. What is important to note for the present discussion is that the probative weight of a hadith in legal reasoning is directly proportional to its quality. A *da'if* hadith cannot be used to establish a new legal ruling or to override an authenticated tradition. A *mawdu'* hadith has no probative value whatsoever. These classical methodological principles, when rigorously applied to the corpus of hadith cited in debates about domestic violence, consistently support the interpretive framework developed in this article.

Patriarchal Culture and the Transmission of Hadith Interpretation

One of the most important contributions of hermeneutical analysis to the study of hadith is its capacity to distinguish between the content of the hadith themselves and the interpretive traditions that have accumulated around them. This distinction is particularly important in the area of gender relations because, as scholars such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan have argued, many of the interpretive accretions around gender-related texts reflect patriarchal cultural assumptions that have been imported into the tradition rather than derived from it (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002; Hassan, 1979).

This is not to suggest that classical scholars were uniformly complicit in a patriarchal project or that their interpretations lack genuine insight. The classical tradition contains remarkably diverse opinions on questions of spousal relations, and many classical scholars took very seriously the imperative of just treatment of women. The point is rather that the

institutional conditions under which hadith scholarship was conducted, including the near-exclusive participation of men in the scholarly class, the social organization of households around male authority, and the legal frameworks of the societies in which scholars lived, created systematic pressures toward interpretations that reinforced existing hierarchies.

Abou El Fadl's study of Islamic legal authority argues that the construction of authoritative interpretation in Islamic law has often involved mechanisms of exclusion that limited the range of perspectives brought to bear on contested texts (Abou El Fadl, 2001). In the specific domain of family law, the exclusion of women from the institutions of hadith scholarship meant that texts about women's experience were interpreted almost entirely by men whose social position gave them no direct experience of the subordinate position those texts addressed. The result was an interpretive tradition shaped by the experiential horizon of those with power rather than those without it.

Wadud's concept of tawhidic paradigm argues that the fundamental Islamic commitment to the oneness of God entails, at the level of social ethics, a recognition of the equal spiritual and moral standing of all human beings before God. Interpretations that systematically subordinate one group of human beings to the arbitrary authority of another must therefore be examined with particular care to determine whether they reflect prophetic teaching or patriarchal projection (Wadud, 1999). This is not an external critique imported from Western feminism but an argument grounded in the internal logic of Islamic theology itself.

The Prophetic Model as Hermeneutical Key

Contemporary hadith scholarship has increasingly emphasized the importance of reading individual hadith against the comprehensive background of the Prophet's documented conduct and character. This approach, sometimes called the prophetic model approach, holds that the Prophet's life provides a hermeneutical key for resolving ambiguities in individual texts. When a text is ambiguous or appears to permit conduct that seems inconsistent with the Prophet's character as known from other sources, the documented character takes interpretive priority.

The documented personal conduct of the Prophet Muhammad with respect to his wives and to women in general presents a remarkably consistent picture. Multiple authenticated traditions describe a man who shared domestic responsibilities, consulted his wives on important matters, accepted criticism from them, expressed affection openly, and consistently maintained a posture of gentleness even in situations of conflict. The report of Aisha that the Prophet never struck any person with his hand, and the numerous traditions recording his explicit condemnations of those who harm women, establish this documented conduct as a primary data point for interpretation.

From a classical ushul fiqh perspective, the principle that the Prophet's actions have normative authority (hujjiyyat al-fi'l al-nabawi) supports using his documented personal practice as an interpretive resource. If the Prophet himself consistently chose non-violence across decades of family life, including in situations of spousal disagreement and marital tension, then an interpretation that identifies violence as a legitimate first-line response to such situations has a high burden of proof to meet. The evidence needed to override the

documented prophetic practice must be strong, specific, and clear, and the examined hadith traditions simply do not provide that standard of evidence.

Legal Framework and Contemporary Application in Indonesia

The interpretive conclusions developed in this article have direct relevance to the Indonesian legal and social context. The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU PKDRT) defines domestic violence broadly to include physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm, covering all residents of a shared household regardless of their formal relationship. This legal framework embodies a conception of family relations as governed by equal rights and mutual protection rather than by hierarchical authority, a conception that aligns closely with the prophetic model and the maqasid-based interpretation developed in this article.

For religious leaders, educators, and counselors working within Muslim communities in Indonesia, the interpretive framework developed here offers several practical implications. First, it provides theologically grounded grounds for a clear and unequivocal message that domestic violence is religiously prohibited and not merely legally impermissible. This message is more likely to be effective in religious communities if it is understood as Islamic teaching rather than as an external legal imposition. Second, it provides a basis for challenging interpretations that use religious authority to discourage victims from seeking legal protection, counseling, or separation. Third, it supports the development of family counseling and conflict resolution resources grounded in the prophetic model of dialogue, patience, and mutual consultation as the proper response to marital difficulty.

Organizations such as Komnas Perempuan and Lembaga Bantuan Hukum have documented that religious misinterpretation is among the significant factors that discourage domestic violence victims from seeking help and that enable abusers to rationalize their conduct. A well-grounded and publicly accessible account of what Islamic teaching actually says about domestic violence, informed by the hermeneutical analysis developed in this article, could serve as a resource for public education efforts, training for religious leaders, and the development of more effective institutional responses to the problem.

The Indonesian tradition of Islamic scholarship, represented by institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, has generated significant internal resources for this project. Figures such as Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, who developed the concept of qira'ah mubadalah (reciprocal reading), have demonstrated how classical Islamic texts can be read from within the tradition to yield interpretations that affirm the equal dignity and full humanity of women (Abdul Kodir, 2019). The hermeneutical framework developed in this article converges with and supports these internal reform efforts rather than replacing them with an external framework.

Toward a Constructive Framework for Hadith Interpretation on Domestic Violence

Drawing together the threads of the preceding analysis, this section proposes a constructive interpretive framework for hadith on domestic violence that is both methodologically responsible and ethically adequate. This framework does not aim to displace

classical hadith scholarship but to work within and extend it using insights from modern hermeneutical theory.

The first principle is the priority of the prophetic model. The documented personal conduct of the Prophet Muhammad, which consistently demonstrates non-violence, kindness, and respect toward women, serves as the primary interpretive lens through which individual hadith texts on spousal relations must be read. Texts that appear to permit harmful conduct must be evaluated against this documented prophetic practice, and the bar for overriding it must be set very high.

The second principle is maqasid alignment. Interpretations of hadith must be evaluated for their consistency with the fundamental objectives of Islamic law, particularly the protection of life, human dignity, and the integrity of family life. Interpretations that consistently produce harm, trauma, and injustice fail this test and must be revised regardless of their formal textual arguments. The principle that harm is prohibited (*la darar wa la dirar*) is not a secondary consideration but a foundational axiom of Islamic jurisprudence.

The third principle is historical contextualization without historicism. Understanding the social context in which hadith were transmitted and interpreted is essential for identifying which elements of received interpretations reflect universal prophetic teaching and which reflect historically contingent social arrangements. This does not mean that every aspect of prophetic teaching is culturally relative or that the moral content of hadith can be reduced to its historical occasion. It means rather that the moral trajectory of prophetic teaching, which moved consistently toward greater dignity and protection for women, must be extrapolated forward rather than frozen at any particular historical moment.

The fourth principle is critical reflexivity about the interpreter's own horizon. Contemporary interpreters must acknowledge that they too bring a horizon shaped by their social location, their institutional affiliations, and their personal interests. This acknowledgment does not invalidate interpretation but demands that it be conducted with transparency about these influences and with genuine openness to being corrected by the text. In practice, this means that interpretations on gender-related texts should be developed with the active participation of women scholars and women who have direct experience of the consequences of those interpretations.

The fifth principle is integration of classical methodology and contemporary theory. Hermeneutical analysis is not a replacement for the classical sciences of *isnad* criticism, *matan* analysis, study of *sabab al-wurud*, and the principles of *ushul fiqh*. It is a philosophical deepening of interpretive consciousness that helps identify the conditions under which those classical tools have been applied and the ways in which they can be applied more rigorously. The goal is not a choice between tradition and modernity but a more comprehensive understanding that draws on both.

Responses to Criticism of the Hermeneutical Approach

The application of hermeneutical theory to hadith studies has attracted substantive criticism from within the Islamic scholarly tradition that deserves serious engagement rather than dismissal. The most significant objection is that hermeneutics, as a discipline developed

primarily within the European philosophical tradition, lacks authority within Islamic epistemology and may introduce foreign assumptions that distort rather than illuminate the meaning of prophetic texts. A related concern is that by emphasizing the role of the reader's horizon in shaping interpretation, hermeneutics threatens to undermine the objectivity and binding force of hadith as authoritative sources of religious guidance.

These concerns are real and deserve acknowledgment. The response offered here is not that hermeneutics should replace the classical sciences of hadith but that it provides philosophical tools for examining dimensions of the interpretive process that classical methodology took for granted. Every act of interpretation involves a reader who brings assumptions, experiences, and social positioning to the text. The classical scholars were aware of this at some level, as evidenced by their insistence on the moral and intellectual formation of the interpreter (ijtihad), but they did not develop systematic tools for analyzing how these pre-understandings function. Hermeneutical theory provides such tools without displacing the substantive content of classical methodology.

The concern about relativism is addressed by recognizing that hermeneutics does not eliminate the distinction between better and worse interpretations. Gadamer himself insisted that the fusion of horizons is not an arbitrary mixing of perspectives but a disciplined dialogue in which the text has genuine authority to correct the reader's pre-understandings. Applied to hadith interpretation, this means that the text retains authority and that interpretations must be accountable to it. The argument of this article is precisely that a hermeneutically informed reading produces a more adequate account of what the hadith corpus actually says about domestic violence than a reading that proceeds without such awareness.

A further objection concerns the risk that hermeneutical analysis becomes a vehicle for importing contemporary secular or feminist ideologies into Islamic scholarship under the guise of methodological neutrality. This risk is genuine and should be taken seriously. The appropriate response is transparency about the assumptions and commitments that inform the analysis, combined with rigorous attention to the classical scholarly tradition. The interpretive conclusions of this article are not derived solely from contemporary theoretical frameworks; they are grounded in careful examination of the most reliable hadith, the documented conduct of the Prophet, and the established principles of Islamic legal methodology. The hermeneutical framework serves to make explicit the interpretive choices involved in this examination rather than to substitute an external agenda for internal Islamic reasoning.

Implications for Religious Education and Community Practice

The interpretive framework developed in this article carries important implications beyond the academy. Religious education in Muslim communities, from Friday sermons and halaqah circles to formal madrasa instruction, shapes the interpretive horizon that ordinary believers bring to questions of marital conduct. When religious education uncritically transmits permissive interpretations of hadith on spousal discipline without providing the methodological context that classical scholars themselves attached to those interpretations, it contributes to an interpretive environment in which abuse can be rationalized and victims can be silenced.

Effective religious education on this issue requires not only correcting specific misinterpretations but also cultivating what might be called hermeneutical literacy among practitioners. By hermeneutical literacy is meant the capacity to recognize that interpretation is always a contextual activity, that the meaning a person extracts from a text reflects not only the text itself but also the assumptions and social positions they bring to it, and that responsible interpretation requires critical self-awareness about these dimensions. This is not a call for skepticism about the authority of hadith; it is a call for the kind of interpretive discipline that the greatest classical scholars themselves exemplified.

Training programs for religious counselors, imams, and family mediators could incorporate sessions on hadith methodology, the maqasid framework, and the hermeneutical principles developed in this article. Such training would equip religious leaders to address cases of domestic violence with both theological clarity and pastoral sensitivity. It would also enable them to challenge, on Islamic grounds, the misuse of religious texts by abusers seeking to justify their conduct. The availability of credentialed Islamic scholars who can speak clearly and authoritatively to the prohibition of domestic violence in Islamic teaching is a significant resource that communities should develop and deploy more systematically.

The broader educational context matters as well. Research on domestic violence consistently shows that prevention is most effective when it addresses the cultural norms and structural conditions that normalize violence rather than focusing exclusively on punishing offenders after the fact. Religious education that consistently frames marriage as a relationship of mutual dignity, shared responsibility, and tender care contributes to the formation of precisely the cultural norms that make violence less thinkable. The prophetic model, presented not as a distant historical ideal but as a living standard for Muslim family life, can serve as a powerful positive vision rather than merely a prohibition against specific acts.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that a hermeneutically informed reading of Prophetic hadith on domestic violence produces a clear and consistent conclusion: the overall orientation of authentic hadith is toward the prohibition of violence, the protection of women's dignity, and the realization of mercy and justice in family life. This conclusion is not a revisionist reading imposed on the texts from outside the Islamic tradition; it is what emerges from careful attention to the most methodologically reliable hadith when they are read comprehensively and against the background of the Prophet's documented personal conduct.

Interpretations that have used hadith to justify or minimize domestic violence reflect a combination of inadequate attention to hadith criticism, selective reading of the relevant corpus, and the projection of patriarchal cultural assumptions onto texts that do not support them when read with appropriate methodological rigor. The hermeneutical analysis developed here, drawing on Gadamer, Fazlur Rahman, Ricoeur, and the maqasid al-shari'ah framework, provides tools for identifying these interpretive failures and for developing more adequate alternatives.

The practical stakes of this argument are high. Indonesia continues to record tens of thousands of cases of domestic violence annually, and religious justification remains among

the factors that discourage victims from seeking help and that enable abusers to rationalize their conduct. A clear, publicly accessible account of what the Islamic tradition actually teaches on this question, grounded in methodologically responsible analysis, is both an intellectual task and a moral obligation. The prophetic model of non-violence, dignity, and mercy in family life is not a distant ideal but a concrete and documented pattern of behavior that the Islamic tradition has always recognized as normative. Making that recognition effective in the present requires hermeneutical clarity, critical reflexivity, and a genuine commitment to the protection of the vulnerable that the Prophet's teaching demands.

Future research should extend this analysis in several directions. Empirical studies of how religious leaders and community counselors in Indonesia use or resist the interpretive framework developed here would provide important feedback on its practical adequacy. Comparative studies examining how similar hermeneutical questions have been addressed in other Muslim-majority legal and social contexts would enrich the analysis and identify transferable insights. Finally, collaborative research involving women scholars, domestic violence advocates, and specialists in hadith methodology could strengthen both the academic rigor and the social impact of hermeneutical work on this critical issue.

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