

CHILD GROOMING IN THE QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF CHILD PROTECTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

The increasing prevalence of child grooming in digital spaces represents a new form of sexual violence against children that is covert, manipulative, and sustained over time. Private digital interactions with minimal supervision significantly heighten children's vulnerability to psychological and emotional exploitation. While child protection has been widely examined in legal and psychological studies, Islamic scholarship that systematically explores Qur'anic-based child protection through a thematic tafsir approach remains limited. This study aims to: (1) formulate the concept of child protection in the Qur'an based on its foundational values and principles; (2) analyze child grooming practices through a Qur'anic ethical framework with reference to publicly documented digital cases; and (3) assess the relevance and actualization of these principles within increasingly complex digital interactions. Employing a qualitative library-based methodology, this research applies a thematic (*mawḍū'ī*) tafsīr approach supported by linguistic and semantic analysis of key Qur'anic terms such as *hifz* (protection), *zulm* (injustice), and *fasād* (corruption). The findings demonstrate that the Qur'an positions children as moral and social subjects of protection; child grooming constitutes a form of *zulm* due to the abuse of power relations and *fasād* due to its destructive impact on children's psychological development and social order; and Qur'anic principles remain ethically relevant and adaptable as preventive foundations for child protection in the digital era.

Keywords: *child grooming, qur'anic ethics, digital space*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of child grooming constitutes a form of sexualized power-based crime that has increasingly proliferated within digital spaces. It is characterized by perpetrators' manipulative approaches toward child victims through online platforms. As active users of social media, children occupy a particularly vulnerable position due to limited digital literacy, inadequate social protection mechanisms, and developmental characteristics that render them more susceptible to manipulative relationships with adults. Empirical cases in Indonesia demonstrate that this issue has reached an urgent level, requiring comprehensive responses across legal, educational, familial, and digital policy sectors. The exponential growth of digital technology has fundamentally transformed patterns of social interaction, including interactions between children and external actors. While digital platforms, such as social media, messaging applications, and online games offer opportunities for learning and communication, they also provide spaces exploited by sexual offenders to engage in child grooming. This process involves deliberate and gradual manipulation aimed at establishing emotional bonds or trust with children for the purpose of subsequent sexual exploitation, often without direct physical contact.

In practice, perpetrators employ staged strategies that exploit children's psychological vulnerabilities to satisfy their own desires or objectives. This dynamic reflects an unequal power relationship in which children are positioned as controlled subjects and are sexually exploited. (Winiari & Mufid, 2022) In the Indonesian context, cyber child grooming has been reported as a prevalent form of online child sexual exploitation occurring through social media platforms. Existing studies indicate that the ease of internet access and the expansion of digital interactions have contributed to an increase in cases across various regions, where initial interactions via digital platforms ultimately lead to the sexualization of children. (Nuryah & Warsono, 2023)

The phenomenon of child grooming in digital spaces has become increasingly prominent and has drawn significant public attention due to its concealed, manipulative, and long-term nature. One notable illustration is the experience of Aurelie Moeremans, as documented in her memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth*, which records her experiences as a victim of child grooming since adolescence. This narrative demonstrates how relationships that initially appear as forms of care and emotional support gradually evolve into patterns of domination, social isolation, and emotional as well as psychological exploitation. The publication of this digital memoir generated widespread public discourse, as it reflects the vulnerability of children in their interactions with adults in an era characterized by social media and intimate private communication. Through *Broken Strings*, Aurelie exposes recurring grooming patterns that often escape public and institutional oversight, such as excessive attention, gift-giving, and praise aimed at fostering emotional dependency, followed by systematic efforts to isolate and control the victim's personal life. These practices are frequently reinforced through the construction of "special secrets," which discourage victims from disclosing their experiences.

Such patterns indicate that child grooming does not solely manifest in the form of physical violence, but rather as subtle and sustained psychological manipulation. Within digital environments, these practices are further facilitated by interactions that transcend

physical boundaries and operate under minimal supervision. Consequently, Aurelie's case represents not merely an individual experience, but also highlights the structural vulnerability of children within private and rapidly evolving digital relationships, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen digital literacy and child protection systems in the era of information technology.

Public attention has also been drawn to cases involving viral sexually explicit conversations between adult men and 12-year-old children circulating on social media, illustrating how perpetrators increasingly exploit digital relationships to target victims beyond parental or community supervision. Furthermore, Indonesian legal scholars and law enforcement authorities emphasize that such acts do not constitute mere online interactions, but rather form part of a complex pattern of sexual exploitation that must be identified and addressed decisively within the legal system. (Haikal, 2024)

Children and adolescents constitute the most vulnerable groups in digital spaces due to their ongoing psychological development, high levels of curiosity, and relatively limited digital literacy skills. In the era of social media, children spend a significant amount of time online, and many of them engage with various platforms without full supervision from parents or guardians. According to UNICEF reports drawing on data from Indonesia, children's exposure to experiences of exploitation or sexual solicitation remains considerably high, with many victims refraining from reporting their experiences due to trauma, fear, or feelings of shame. (Unicef, 2022)

The increasing prevalence of child grooming cases in digital spaces demonstrates that reliance on positive law and technological measures alone is insufficient to provide comprehensive protection for children. A preventive and transformative ethical framework is therefore required, one that functions not merely as a reactive mechanism after harm has occurred, but also fosters moral awareness and social responsibility. In this regard, the Qur'anic perspective is particularly urgent, as it offers ethical principles oriented toward prevention (prevention-oriented ethics) and the protection of vulnerable groups, including children. (Draz, 2025)

The Qur'an consistently positions children as a trust (*amānah*) that must be safeguarded in physical, psychological, and moral terms. This principle of protection is not directed solely at parents, but extends to society as a collective responsibility. Prohibitions against *zulm* (oppression), *fasād* (corruption or harm), and violations of human dignity constitute an ethical foundation that is highly relevant for interpreting child grooming as a form of relational crime rooted in the abuse of authority. (Shihab, 2002) The Qur'an does not merely provide normative legitimacy, but also offers a value-based framework aimed at preventing sexual exploitation from the earliest stages of social interaction.

The Qur'anic approach emphasizes the principle of *sad ad-dharā'i* (blocking the means to harm), which is conceptually aligned with efforts to prevent child sexual crimes in digital spaces. Unregulated or overly permissive interactions that create opportunities for emotional manipulation of children can be understood as "pathways" to harm that must be addressed through regulation, education, and the reinforcement of social ethics. (Wahbah az-Zuhaili, 1986) In the Indonesian context, where religious values continue to exert a strong influence on social life, the Qur'anic perspective has the potential to serve as an effective moral foundation for strengthening preventive, rather than merely repressive approaches to child

protection.

Qur'anic values are universal and timeless, rendering them relevant for addressing a wide range of contemporary challenges, including digitally mediated sexual crimes. Principles such as justice (*'adl*), the protection of the vulnerable (*himāya ad-ḍu'afā*), and respect for human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*) constitute foundational Qur'anic values that can be contextualized in responding to the challenges of the digital era. (Rahman, 1982) In the context of child grooming, these values demand the establishment of social relations that are just and safe for children, both in physical and virtual spaces. The relevance of the Qur'an is also evident in its holistic rather than partial approach. The Qur'an conceptualizes sexual crimes not merely as individual violations, but as social problems shaped by relational structures, cultural norms, and systems of supervision. This perspective aligns with contemporary analyses that understand child grooming as a crime rooted in power relations and informational asymmetries between perpetrators and victims. (Indonesia, 2020) Qur'anic values can function as an ethical framework that bridges religious discourse with modern social studies.

In the Indonesian context, the relevance of Qur'anic values is further reinforced by the high level of internet penetration among children and adolescents, along with the rising incidence of online sexual violence. A Qur'an-based approach can contribute to the development of digital literacy that is not merely technical in nature, but also incorporates moral and spiritual dimensions. Accordingly, Qur'anic values do not remain confined to the normative-theological sphere, but are transformed into principles of public ethics that are responsive to contemporary issues, including child protection in the digital era. ((KPPPA), 2022)

Studies on child protection from a Qur'anic perspective have been widely conducted by scholars using various approaches, particularly thematic Qur'anic exegesis and the framework of *maqāsid asy-syari'ah*. These studies consistently emphasize that Islam views children as a trust (*amānah*) whose rights and dignity must be safeguarded from before birth until they reach maturity. Child protection in the Qur'an encompasses physical, psychological, moral, and educational dimensions, which are normatively grounded in the principles of the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) and the protection of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*). Qur'anic verses that prohibit the killing of children, exploitation, and oppressive treatment of vulnerable groups are understood as providing a strong theological foundation for the concept of child protection in Islam. Generally, these studies position children as legal and moral subjects who possess inherent rights to be protected from all forms of violence and injustice. (Ma'murotussa'adah, 2015)

On the other hand, Islamic studies addressing sexual crimes, including sexual violence against children, have predominantly been examined through the perspectives of Islamic law and Islamic education. A number of studies in Islamic jurisprudence analyze the protection of child victims of sexual violence through fiqh discourse, the Compilation of Islamic Law, and Indonesia's positive legal system. These studies indicate that although explicit regulations concerning child sexual violence are not always found in classical Islamic legal texts, fundamental Islamic principles, such as justice, the protection of vulnerable groups, and the prevention of harm can serve as normative foundations for ensuring maximum protection for child victims and for imposing sanctions on perpetrators. Beyond juridical approaches,

research in the field of Islamic education emphasizes the importance of value-based sexual education grounded in Islamic teachings as a preventive measure against sexual crimes involving children. Instruction on ethical social interaction (*adab al-mu'āsharah*), bodily boundaries (*'awrah*), healthy gender relations, as well as the roles of family and the broader social environment, is regarded as a crucial instrument in building a sustainable child protection system. (Abdullah, 2001; Nurlaila, 2024)

Nevertheless, the majority of previous studies remain predominantly normative–descriptive in nature, both in articulating the concept of child protection in the Qur'an and in addressing sexual crimes from the perspectives of Islamic law and Islamic education. These studies generally have not explicitly integrated Qur'anic textual analysis with the issue of child sexual crimes in contemporary contexts, particularly by framing such phenomena as serious violations of Qur'anic principles of protection. Accordingly, the present study seeks to fill this gap by examining child protection in the Qur'an in a more contextual and applicative manner in relation to the problem of child sexual crimes. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of thematic interpretation of Qur'anic verses on child protection, the principles of *maqāṣid asy-syari'ah*, and an analysis of the contemporary realities of child sexual crimes in the modern era. Through this approach, the study aims to offer a Qur'an-based ethical and preventive framework that is relevant to strengthening child protection systems. (Auda, 2008; Haikal, 2024)

The Qur'an contains fundamental principles of child protection that position children as legal and moral subjects who must be safeguarded from all forms of violence, exploitation, and unjust treatment. However, these principles have generally been understood in a normative manner and have rarely been contextualized in relation to non-physical forms of sexual crimes that have emerged in the digital era, such as child grooming. Accordingly, this study formulates three main research questions. First, how is the concept of child protection in the Qur'an articulated through its core values and foundational principles? Second, how can the practice of child grooming be interpreted and explained through a Qur'anic value-based approach by referring to publicly documented cases in digital spaces? Third, how relevant and applicable are these Qur'anic principles within the context of increasingly complex digital interactions that are highly vulnerable to sexual crimes against children.

This study aims to construct a Qur'an-based framework of child protection that is both normative and contextual. In addition, it seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the field of child education from an Islamic perspective, which has thus far been more extensively explored within non-Islamic academic disciplines. The practical contribution of this research lies in providing Islamic ethical foundations that may serve as references for preventive and protective efforts in digital spaces, to be utilized by families, educators, and relevant stakeholders.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting Qur'anic principles of child protection in order to maintain their relevance in addressing the challenges posed by sexual crimes in the digital era. By integrating Qur'anic values with contemporary phenomena of child-related digital interactions, this article is expected to broaden the scope of Qur'anic studies and contemporary Islamic scholarship, while also offering contextual contributions to the strengthening of child protection systems

grounded in Islamic ethics and values.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, as its primary focus lies in meaning-making, interpretation, and textual analysis of religious sources, particularly the Qur'an in response to the contemporary social phenomenon of child grooming. A library-based research method enables an in-depth exploration of concepts, values, and principles of child protection within the Qur'an through authoritative and relevant written sources.

The methodological approach adopted in this study is thematic exegesis. This approach treats Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme in this case, child protection, human dignity, and the prevention of sexual crimes as an integrated unit of analysis examined comprehensively. Thematic exegesis is considered particularly relevant because it allows for the interconnection of Qur'anic messages dispersed across different chapters and verses, thereby producing a holistic and contextual understanding of child protection issues in the digital era. (al-Farmāwi, 1997; Danandjaja, 2014)

First, a linguistic analysis is conducted, encompassing the examination of lafz (word structure and morphological form), lexical meanings, and the contextual usage of verses within the Qur'an. This analysis aims to ensure an accurate understanding of the Qur'an's normative messages and to avoid reductive interpretations of the text. Second, a semantic analysis is applied to key terms related to child protection and sexual crimes, such as the concept of the prohibition against approaching zina, the protection of vulnerable groups, and the safeguarding of honor (*hifz al-'ird*). This semantic approach is employed to trace the development of Qur'anic terminology and to assess its relevance to the phenomenon of child grooming as a form of non-physical sexual crime. (Izutsu, 2002)

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include the Qur'an and classical as well as contemporary Qur'anic commentaries relevant to the theme of child protection, such as the works of *at-Tabarī*, *Ibn Kasīr*, and *al-Qurṭubī*, along with contemporary exegetical studies that emphasize the social and ethical dimensions of the Qur'an. Secondary sources comprise academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and regulations and policy documents related to child protection, viewed from both Islamic perspectives and positive law. The use of these secondary sources aims to enrich the analysis and to connect Qur'anic principles with the contemporary context of child protection in the modern and digital era. (az-Zuhaili, 1998)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Child Grooming in Contemporary Studies

In contemporary scholarship, child grooming is understood as a gradual psychological process carried out by adults to establish emotional relationships with children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. From a psychological perspective, child grooming constitutes a form of predatory behavior that exploits children's vulnerability, need for affection, and cognitive immaturity. (Smallbone et al., 2008) From a legal perspective, child grooming is

regarded as a preparatory sexual offense which, although it does not always involve physical contact, is nevertheless classified as a serious crime due to its trajectory toward sexual exploitation and sexual violence against children. (Unicef, 2022) From a social perspective, child grooming is understood as an unequal power relationship in which perpetrators leverage positional authority, emotional influence, or technological access to exert gradual control and facilitate exploitation

The practice of child grooming, particularly in digital spaces, follows relatively systematic patterns and stages. The initial stage is typically characterized by efforts to build trust through excessive attention, praise, or gift-giving. Subsequently, perpetrators seek to establish exclusive emotional closeness and engage in social isolation by distancing victims from their families or peers. In more advanced stages, perpetrators begin to exert control over victims' activities, introduce elements of secrecy, and gradually normalize boundary-crossing behaviors. (Haikal, 2024) In digital contexts, these stages are further reinforced by anonymity, private communication channels, and minimal oversight, allowing the grooming process to occur more rapidly and making it more difficult to detect. (Salamor et al., 2020)

The impact of child grooming on children's psychological development is profound and long-term. Victims frequently experience emotional distress, feelings of guilt, psychological dependency, and impaired trust toward adults. In many cases, grooming experiences are further compounded by psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, and difficulties in forming healthy interpersonal relationships later in life. (Nuryah & Warsono, 2023) Because the manipulation occurs gradually and is often disguised as a "caring" or "special" relationship, children frequently do not recognize that they are being exploited, which renders the recovery process more complex. Consequently, child grooming should not be understood merely as a sexual offense, but rather as a form of psychological violence that poses a serious threat to children's overall development.

Children as Subjects of Moral and Social Protection in the Qur'an

The Qur'an positions children not merely as objects of care, but as subjects of moral and social protection whose dignity and rights must be safeguarded. This perspective can be traced through the Qur'an's use of various terms referring to children, such as *walad*, *ṣabiyy*, and *zurriyyah*, each of which carries distinct semantic nuances. The term *walad* is often employed to denote biological relationships and parental responsibility toward children, as reflected in the prohibition against killing one's children out of fear of poverty (Qur'an 6:151; 17:31). Classical exegetes interpret this prohibition as a fundamental form of protection of children's right to life and as an affirmation that children must not become victims of adults' socio-economic conditions. (*al-Ṭabarī*, 2001; Katsir, 1999)

Meanwhile, the term *ṣabiyy* is used in the Qur'an to describe a phase of childhood marked by vulnerability and the need for special care and protection, as illustrated in the account of the Prophet Yahya (Qur'an 19:12). According to al-Qurtubi, the use of this term indicates that a child's age-related weakness constitutes the primary basis for the obligation of protection, rather than a justification for domination or arbitrary treatment. (al-Qurtubi, n.d.) The term *zurriyyah*, on the other hand, emphasizes the dimension of generational continuity and broader social responsibility, wherein children's well-being is viewed as an

integral part of the survival of the community and a collective trust (*amānah*), as reflected in Qur'an 4:9. (*ar-Razi*, n.d.) The Qur'an views children within both individual and social frameworks, each of which demands comprehensive protection.

From the perspective of children's rights, the Qur'an both implicitly and explicitly affirms a number of fundamental rights inherent to children, including the right to life, the right to proper care and nurturing, the right to education and moral development, and the right to grow within a safe and dignified environment. These rights are reflected in Qur'anic injunctions to act benevolently toward family members, prohibitions against neglecting children, and the obligations placed upon parents and society to safeguard the well-being of future generations. Ibn Kasīr emphasizes that responsibility toward children does not end with the fulfillment of material needs, but also encompasses moral and spiritual protection to prevent children from falling into ethical and social corruption. (Katsir, 1999)

The Qur'an unequivocally prohibits all forms of exploitation and violence against children, whether physical, psychological, or structural in nature. Prohibitions against the killing of children, warnings against leaving behind a weak generation, and the principles of justice and compassion constitute a strong ethical foundation for rejecting all forms of exploitative treatment. In contemporary Qur'anic interpretation, these principles are understood to be relevant not only to physical violence but also to non-physical forms of harm, such as manipulation, domination, and the deprivation of children's rights to safety and healthy psychological development. (Auda, 2008; Zulfah, n.d.) Therefore, the Qur'an can be understood as a source of values that positions child protection as a preventive moral and social obligation, rather than merely a reactive response to violations.

Linguistic Analysis of Qur'anic Verses on the Dimensions of Prevention and Social Responsibility

A linguistic analysis of Qur'anic verses related to protection reveals that the concept of protection in Islam is constructed through a complex and interconnected network of meanings. The Qur'an does not employ a single term to articulate the notion of protection; rather, it introduces a set of key concepts that collectively form a preventive ethical framework, including *ḥifẓ* (protection or safeguarding), *zulm* (oppression or injustice), and *fasād* (corruption or harm). A linguistic approach to these terms is essential for understanding that protection in the Qur'an is not merely a response to violations, but a sustained mechanism of moral and social safeguarding.

The term *ḥifẓ* etymologically denotes the act of safeguarding something so that it remains intact, secure, and protected from harm. In the Qur'an, the meaning of *ḥifẓ* is not limited to physical protection, but also encompasses the preservation of values, dignity, and the continuity of human life. This concept is subsequently developed in a systematic manner within the tradition of *usūl fiqh* through the theory of *maqāṣid asy-syari'ah*, which identifies *ḥifẓ an-nafs* (the protection of life), *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (the protection of lineage), and *ḥifẓ al-'ird* (the protection of honor) as among the primary objectives of Islamic law. (Ginting & Ginting, 2019). In the context of child protection, the concept of *ḥifẓ* entails an obligation to safeguard children from all forms of threat, whether physical, psychological, or moral in

nature. Accordingly, protection is not understood in a passive sense, but rather as an active and preventive endeavor aimed at ensuring that children's growth and development occur in a safe and dignified manner.

Conversely, the term *zulm* in the Qur'an is employed to denote all forms of transgression against the principles of justice and balance. Linguistically, *zulm* signifies placing something where it does not belong or exceeding its proper limits. Al-Rāghib *al-Aṣḥānī* emphasizes that *zulm* does not always manifest in overt physical violence, but may also take the form of psychological oppression, manipulation, and systematic, concealed denial of rights. (*ar-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī*, n.d.). Accordingly, practices that exploit children's vulnerability, including emotional domination, excessive control, and the deprivation of a sense of safety may be classified as forms of *zulm*, even in the absence of physical violence. This linguistic understanding broadens the scope of the Qur'anic prohibition of *zulm*, rendering it relevant for interpreting non-physical forms of violence against children in the modern era.

In addition to *zulm*, the Qur'an also employs the term *fasād* to describe actions that undermine and disrupt the order of human life. Linguistically, *fasād* denotes the departure of something from a state of balance toward destruction. In classical exegesis, as articulated by *ar-Razi* and al-Qurtubi, *fasād* is not limited to material damage or overt criminal acts, but also encompasses the corruption of moral values, social relations, and the broader systems that sustain communal life. (*ar-Razi*, n.d.). In the context of child protection, actions that undermine children's psychological development, self-confidence, and social relationships may be understood as forms of *fasād*, as their impact extends beyond individual victims and generates long-term consequences for the quality of future generations and the social order as a whole.

This analysis underscores that protection in the Qur'an possesses a strong preventive dimension and a clear orientation toward social responsibility. Prohibitions against *zulm* and *fasād* are not directed solely at individual perpetrators, but also contain a moral call to society to prevent harm before its consequences become widespread. Within this framework, child protection cannot be placed exclusively on individuals or families, but must be understood as a collective responsibility involving both society and the state. Wahbah az-Zuhaili emphasizes that the principle of prevention (*sadd ad-dāra'i*) in Islamic law constitutes a concrete manifestation of efforts to safeguard public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) and to block the means leading to harm. (Darul Azka dan Nailul Huda, 2018; Wahbah az-Zuhaili, 1986)

The linguistic analysis of Qur'anic verses on protection demonstrates that the Qur'an constructs an ethical system in which protection is positioned as a preventive and socially grounded obligation. From this perspective, child protection is not merely a response to violations that have already occurred, but a continuous effort to maintain conditions of safety, justice, and dignity for the most vulnerable groups. This linguistic framework also provides a strong normative foundation for linking Qur'anic principles to contemporary child protection issues, including the challenges posed by non-physical violence and psychological manipulation in the digital era.

Reconstructing Child Grooming as a Form of *Zulm* and *Fasād*

Within the Qur'anic ethical framework, the practice of child grooming can be reconstructed not merely as a form of individual behavioral deviation, but as a concrete manifestation of *zulm* (oppression) and *fasād* (corruption) that undermines human relationships and disrupts the social order. Such a reconstruction is essential to ensure that the interpretation of child grooming does not remain confined to a purely legal-positivist approach, but also engages the moral and structural dimensions emphasized in Qur'anic values.

Child grooming is fundamentally a manipulative process constructed through asymmetrical power relations between the perpetrator and the child as the victim. In many cases, perpetrators exploit differences in age, experience, authority, or emotional proximity to cultivate the victim's psychological dependence. This relationship gradually shifts the child's position from an autonomous subject to an object of control and domination. From a Qur'anic perspective, such abuse of power relations falls within the category of *zulm*, as it entails placing something where it does not belong and transgressing the boundaries of justice that must be upheld. Al-Rāghib *al-Aṣṣahānī* emphasizes that *zulm* does not occur solely in the form of physical violence, but also manifests in actions that strip individuals of their freedom, deprive them of their rights, and suppress the will of those who are in a weaker position. (*al-Rāghib al-Aṣṣahānī*, n.d.)

The manipulation of power relations in grooming is typically carried out in subtle and layered ways, beginning with the provision of attention, affection, or emotional validation, and gradually evolving into control, social isolation, and the restriction of the victim's access to safe environments. This pattern indicates that *zulm* in grooming is systematic and sustained rather than incidental. In this context, the child is positioned as a vulnerable party lacking full capacity to provide informed consent, rendering any form of exploitation of such vulnerability fundamentally incompatible with the Qur'anic principles of justice and protection. The principle of justice (*al-'adl*) in the Qur'an necessitates proportional treatment and respect for human dignity, particularly toward those who are weak and dependent. (Ginting & Ginting, 2019)

Furthermore, grooming practices can also be categorized as *fasād* because their destructive impact extends beyond the individual victim to the broader moral and social order. In Qur'anic terminology, *fasād* is understood as a condition in which the balance of life is disrupted due to violations of fundamental human values. Al-Qurtubi explains that *fasād* encompasses all forms of actions that undermine religion, life, intellect, lineage, and human dignity. (al-Qurtubi, n.d.) When examined through the framework of *maqāṣid asy-syari'ah*, grooming poses a direct threat to *hifz an-nafs* (the protection of life), *hifz al-'aql* (the protection of intellect), and *hifz an-nasl* (the protection of lineage), as its psychological impacts are often long-term and profoundly affect the victim's personality development.

Violations of the principle of child protection in grooming practices are also evident in the erosion of a child's sense of safety (*amn*) and the breakdown of trust in social relationships. In many cases, victims experience trauma, anxiety, and distorted understandings of healthy relational boundaries, which ultimately contribute to the

reproduction of social vulnerability in later life. From a Qur'anic perspective, such conditions constitute a form of *fasād* fī al-arḍ (corruption on earth), as they generate structural harm that threatens the quality of future generations and the sustainability of society. (Abdul Wahab Khalaf, 1971; Auda, 2008) Therefore, the Qur'an does not condemn *fasād* merely as overt criminal acts, but also as latent and gradual processes that erode the moral foundations of society from within.

Thus, reconstructing child grooming as a form of *zulm* and *fasād* underscores that this practice constitutes a serious violation of the principles of justice and child protection in Islam. This approach broadens the analytical horizon by positioning grooming not merely as a matter of personal ethical misconduct or positive law infringement, but as a moral and social crime that demands collective responsibility. Within this framework, the prevention of grooming becomes part of a shared social obligation (*fard kifāyah*) aimed at blocking the pathways to *zulm* and *fasād*, while simultaneously realizing the primary objectives of Islamic law in safeguarding the dignity and well-being of children.

Child Grooming as a Practice of *Zulm* and *Fasād*: The Case of Aurelie Moeremans

The reconstruction of child grooming as a form of *zulm* and *fasād* finds concrete relevance in the experiences disclosed by Aurelie Moeremans in her memoir *Broken Strings: Fragments of a Stolen Youth*. Her narrative illustrates how grooming operates as an invisible mechanism of oppression that, while often imperceptible in its initial stages, produces profound and enduring psychological and social consequences for the victim. In Aurelie's account, the relationship with the perpetrator was established gradually through emotional attention, personal validation, and claims of intimacy, which later evolved into patterns of control, social isolation, and psychological dependency. This pattern reflects a clear abuse of power relations that can be categorised as *zulm*, as the perpetrator exploited the victim's age-related vulnerability and subordinate position for personal gain. (Moeremans, n.d.).

From a Qur'anic linguistic perspective, *zulm* is understood as an act that transgresses the boundaries of justice and places something outside its proper position. Children, who are morally and socially situated as subjects deserving protection, are instead reduced to objects of domination and manipulation. Aurelie's experience demonstrates that *zulm* in grooming does not necessarily manifest in overt physical violence, but rather through emotional pressure, the restriction of social relationships, and the cultivation of guilt and fear that discourage disclosure. This understanding corresponds with *ar-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī's* explanation that *zulm* encompasses all forms of the deprivation of rights and freedoms, including those carried out subtly and over an extended period of time. (*al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī*, n.d.).

Furthermore, the impact of grooming practices in Aurelie's case does not end with personal suffering, but also reflects elements of *fasād* in the Qur'anic sense. Psychological trauma, distorted understandings of healthy relationships, and the loss of a sense of safety constitute forms of damage that affect the development of the victim's psyche and identity. In classical Qur'anic exegesis, *fasād* is understood as the disruption of the balance of life and the moral values that sustain social order. (al-Qurtubi, n.d.) Accordingly, Aurelie's

experience may be read as an example of *fasād* that originates within a private relationship yet carries broader implications for human dignity and the continuity of future generations.

The digital environment further accentuates the dimension of *fasād*. Relationships established through online media enable perpetrators to create private spaces that are difficult for the victim's social environment to monitor or supervise. In such circumstances, the preventive mechanism that lies at the core of Qur'anic ethics, namely the principle of blocking the means to harm (*sadd ad-dāra'i*) becomes particularly relevant. Aurelie's case illustrates that the failure to detect and prevent grooming at its early stages creates conditions for the continuation of *zulm* and the deepening of *fasād* over time. (Wahbah az-Zuhaili, 1986)

situating Aurelie's case within the framework of *zulm* and *fasād* is not intended to personalize the issue, but rather to underscore that child grooming constitutes a serious violation of the principles of justice and child protection in Islam. The case functions as an empirical illustration that reinforces the normative argument that child protection in the Qur'an is inherently preventive and structural in nature, and that it demands collective responsibility, particularly in responding to the increasingly complex challenges of digital relationships.

The Relevance of Qur'anic Principles in Child Protection in the Digital Era

The expansion of digital spaces has brought about fundamental transformations in patterns of social interaction, including relationships between children and adults. Social media, instant messaging applications, and other online platforms create modes of interaction that are rapid, private, and often extend beyond the effective supervision of families and communities. This condition poses serious ethical challenges, as relationships formed in digital environments are not always framed by clear and established social norms. Within this context, Qur'anic principles of protection, justice, and the prevention of harm face new challenges that require a contextual and critical re-reading to ensure their continued relevance in safeguarding children in the digital age.

One of the principal challenges of digital spaces is the ethical shift from socially regulated relationships toward interactions that are increasingly individualistic, anonymous, and minimally governed by social control. Digital communication enables the formation of emotional intimacy without physical presence, thereby blurring the boundaries between legitimate relationships and those that are manipulative. From a Qur'anic perspective, such conditions potentially open the way to the occurrence of *zulm*, understood as the abuse of power relations that harms vulnerable parties, as well as *fasād*, manifested in the erosion of moral order and the sense of security within society. The Qur'an's prohibition of all forms of *zulm* and *fasād fi al-arḍ* indicates that Islam does not merely respond to harm after it has occurred, but also places strong emphasis on early prevention as a foundational ethical imperative. (*ar-Razi*, n.d.)

Reinterpretation of Qur'anic values is necessary to ensure their continued relevance within the context of digital technology. This reinterpretation is not intended to alter the fundamental principles of the teachings, but rather to actualize their normative objectives in response to new realities. The *maqāṣid asy-syari'ah* approach serves as a crucial framework

in this regard, as it emphasizes that the primary aim of Islamic law is the preservation of human welfare. The principles of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, *ḥifẓ al-‘aql*, and *ḥifẓ al-nasl* may thus function as ethical foundations for addressing digital threats to children, including psychological manipulation, emotional exploitation, and the erosion of a sense of security in online environments. (Auda, 2008)

Consequently, digital space should be understood as an extension of the social sphere that is likewise subject to principles of protection and moral responsibility. The relevance of Qur’anic principles in the digital era also necessitates the involvement of multiple social actors. In Islam, the responsibility for child protection is not placed solely on individuals but is inherently collective in nature. The family plays a primary role as the first environment for instilling ethical values, digital literacy, and awareness of the boundaries of healthy relationships. The Qur’an emphasizes the obligation to safeguard oneself and one’s family from potential harm, which in the contemporary context includes non-physical threats emerging in digital spaces. At the societal level, institutions such as educational, religious, and social organizations function as reinforcers of values and mechanisms of social oversight, ensuring that children are not left to confront digital risks in isolation.

Meanwhile, the state holds a strategic role in providing adequate regulation, protection systems, and preventive mechanisms. From the perspective of *fiqh siyasah*, the state bears the obligation to safeguard the public interest (*maṣlahah ‘ammah*) and to protect vulnerable groups from various forms of exploitation. The principle of *sadd ad-ḍara’i* (blocking the means to harm) may serve as a normative foundation for child protection policies in digital spaces, including platform regulation, public education, and the enforcement of laws against technology-based crimes. (Ma’murotussa’adah, 2015) Accordingly, child protection in the digital era constitutes a shared responsibility that must be constructed through synergy between Qur’anic values and contextually responsive social policies.

By examining digital challenges through the lens of Qur’anic values, it can be affirmed that the principle of protection in Islam is both adaptive and future-oriented. The Qur’an offers an ethical framework that is not bound by space and time, yet requires continuous actualization in order to respond effectively to emerging forms of *zulm* and *fāsād*. In this context, Qur’anic principles are not only relevant as normative foundations, but also function as a preventive basis for cultivating digital spaces that are safe, just, and dignified for children.

Based on an examination of Qur’anic principles, it can be affirmed that the Qur’an provides a robust ethical foundation for constructing systems of child protection in digital spaces. Values such as justice (*al-‘adl*), protection (*ḥifẓ*), and the prevention of harm (*sadd al-dharā’i*) position children as dignified subjects who must be safeguarded from all forms of *zulm* and *fāsād*, including those that occur latently through digital interactions. Within this framework, the Qur’an functions not only as a source of normative legitimacy but also as a preventive guide that underscores the importance of oversight, social responsibility, and the cultivation of ethical relationships from the earliest stages of online engagement.

These normative implications make a significant contribution to strengthening policy frameworks and digital literacy education grounded in Islamic values. Qur’anic principles may serve as ethical references in the formulation of child protection policies at the levels of

the family, educational institutions, and the state, ensuring that resulting regulations are not merely technical in nature but are also rooted in humanitarian and moral values. Moreover, the integration of Islamic values into digital literacy programs has the potential to foster critical awareness among children and their surrounding environments regarding the risks of manipulation and exploitation in digital spaces. Accordingly, Qur'anic principles contribute not only as a normative framework, but also as an educational and preventive foundation for the realization of digital environments that are safe, just, and oriented toward the best interests of the child.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of child protection in the Qur'an is constructed upon a set of core values and principles that position children as dignified subjects who must be safeguarded morally, socially, and structurally. Through a thematic analysis of Qur'anic verses, it is found that the principles of *hifz* (protection), justice (*al-'adl*), and the prohibition of *zulm* and *fasād* constitute a preventive ethical framework that is oriented not only toward responding to violations, but also toward averting harm from an early stage. This framework affirms that child protection in Islam is active, continuous, and constitutes a collective responsibility.

A reading of child grooming practices through the lens of Qur'anic values reveals that this phenomenon can be reconstructed as a form of *zulm*, insofar as it involves the abuse of power relations and the exploitation of children's vulnerability, as well as a manifestation of *fasād* due to its destructive impact on victims' psychological development, social relationships, and human dignity. Drawing on publicly visible cases in digital spaces, grooming practices do not always appear in the form of physical violence, but often operate through gradual and concealed emotional and psychological manipulation. A Qur'anic approach enables an expanded understanding of violence and child exploitation, encompassing non-physical forms that frequently escape social and legal scrutiny.

This study affirms that the principles of child protection articulated in the Qur'an retain strong and contemporary relevance within the increasingly complex landscape of digital interaction. The reinterpretation of Qur'anic values through a *maqāṣid asy-syari'ah* approach enables the principles of protection, justice, and the prevention of harm to be applied in addressing challenges arising in digital spaces, including the risks of sexual crimes against children. The actualization of these principles requires synergistic engagement among families, communities, and the state, whether through the strengthening of ethical norms in digital relationships, the development of digital literacy education grounded in Islamic values, or the formulation of child protection policies with a preventive orientation. Accordingly, the Qur'an functions not only as a normative source, but also as an ethical and preventive foundation for the construction of digital environments that are safe, just, and aligned with the best interests of the child.

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