

# Gender Hierarchy Interpretation in Disaster Context: A Critical Analysis of Qawwamah in the Sumatra Floods

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**Abstract.** The 2025 Sumatra floods exposed acute structural vulnerabilities among women, exacerbated by the internalization of medieval patriarchal theological constructs. This study aims to deconstruct the traditional gender hierarchy in Islamic exegesis using Karen Bauer's historical-contextual approach to assess its functional validity during modern disaster crises. Employing Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and a critical hermeneutical framework, this research analyzes classical texts regarding *qawwamah* (QS. An-Nisa: 34) and female testimony (QS. Al-Baqarah: 282) alongside empirical field reports from the PERMAMPU Consortium. The findings reveal the phenomenon of "Structural Qawwamah Dysfunction" in disaster zones; because male authority is legally conditioned upon physical protection (*jaddala*) and economic provision (*infaq*), this authority becomes functionally void during *force majeure* scenarios where such capacities collapse. Furthermore, the study debunks the theological stigma of women's intellectual deficiency (*nuqsan al-aql*) as a contextual-sociological limitation rather than a biological absolute. While these findings are methodologically bound to extreme crises, the study concludes that maintaining rigid gender hierarchies during emergencies contradicts the *maqasid* principle of *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of life). It urgently calls for a "Gender-Responsive Disaster Theology" that shifts the paradigm from female subordination to strategic partnership, acknowledging women as autonomous subjects with full religious legitimacy to lead self-rescue initiatives.

**Keywords:** Sumatra Flood Disaster, Karen Bauer, Qawwamah, Gender Vulnerability, Exegetical Reconstruction.

## Introduction

The flood disasters that struck multiple regions of Sumatra at the end of 2025 are predominantly viewed as natural ecological crises. However, empirical ground realities expose a severe and systemic gender disparity in disaster management. Advocacy reports from the PERMAMPU Consortium, widely corroborated by regional media coverage, highlighted the acute vulnerability of women and marginalized groups, recording at least 1,385 directly affected women.<sup>1</sup> This vulnerability manifested not as an isolated anomaly, but as a widespread regional pattern. Contextual news reports and grassroots networks documented extreme exploitation across multiple disaster zones. Beyond a severe case of gender-based violence during an evacuation process in Aceh, localized media reported alarming instances of sexual harassment and security failures within emergency public shelters across culturally diverse areas, ranging from West Sumatra to the urban outskirts of Medan. These empirical

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<sup>1</sup> [lp2m.or.id](https://lp2m.or.id), "Perayaan 16 Hari Aktivisme Penghapusan Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan PERMAMPU Soroti 'Kekerasan Digital Serta Kerentanan Perempuan Saat Bencana' - LP2M," Lembaga Pengkajian dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (LP2M), 2025, <https://lp2m.or.id/perayaan-16-hari-aktivisme-penghapusan-kekerasan-terhadap-perempuan-permampu-soroti-kekerasan-digital-serta-kerentanan-perempuan-saat-bencana/>.

facts illustrate a critical protection gap, prompting an urgent inquiry into why existing societal support systems fail to secure women's safety when normal structures collapse.<sup>2</sup>

This vulnerability manifests paradoxically within highly observant Sumatran societies where Islamic values are deeply revered. Rather than originating from the egalitarian essence of the sacred text itself, these gender disparities stem from the historical normalization of medieval exegetical frameworks. Classical interpretations of *qawwamah* (guardianship) in QS An-Nisa verse 34 were propounded by medieval exegetes like Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Al-Wāḥidī (d. 1076), and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). Crucially, the societal internalization of these textual norms is far from uniform. In Aceh, these interpretations are systematically deployed to reinforce a patrifocal socio-political structure<sup>3</sup>, whereas in Sumatera Barat, they generate a profound cultural paradox by superimposing patriarchal dogmas onto a traditionally matrilineal kinship system.<sup>4</sup> Thus, classical exegesis does not mechanically cause physical vulnerability during crises. Instead, as a contextual product of its medieval era, it functions as a potent discursive framework that naturalizes women's dependency on male protection, ultimately undermining their autonomy and resilience when emergency situations shatter everyday social structures.

The dominance of the hierarchical understanding of *Qawwamah* in Q.S An-Nisa [4]: 34 creates an illusion of safety the assumption, that women will remain secure under male leadership. It is important to acknowledge that classical exegetical tradition is not a monolithic ideological bloc; scholars like Al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr employed vastly distinct methodological approaches, ranging from tradition-based (*bi al-ma'thur*) to rational-philosophical (*bi al-ra'y*). However, as Karen Bauer notes, despite their epistemological differences, their interpretations converged on a patriarchal consensus shaped by their shared medieval socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, in modern disaster realities, which are force majeure situations that paralyze men's physical and economic capacities, this medieval consensus becomes highly problematic.<sup>5</sup> As per Iris Marion Young's (2003) critique of the 'Logic of Masculinist Protection', when "the leaders" become victims themselves, this deeply internalized hierarchical structure fails to provide alternative mechanisms for women's autonomy and self-rescue.<sup>6</sup> Thus, women become victims not merely of the floodwaters, but of a socio-religious interpretative structure that fails to accommodate crisis realities, necessitating a critical deconstruction of its application in disaster zones.

To execute this critical deconstruction, the study utilizes Karen Bauer's historical-contextual framework as its primary hermeneutical tool. Through this distinct interpretive lens, two foundational concepts that restrict female autonomy during disasters are re-examined. First, it historicizes the traditional application of *Qawwamah* in Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34. By applying Bauer's analysis of conditionality, the absolute authority of male guardianship is shown to lose its functional justification when natural disasters eliminate its material prerequisites—namely, physical protection and economic maintenance. Second, this framework offers a critical re-evaluation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 282. In emergencies requiring rapid, autonomous risk assessments, the lingering theological stigma of women's intellectual deficiency (*nuqsan al-'aql*) functions as a severe systemic barrier. This internal bias

<sup>2</sup> "Catatan Akhir Tahun 2025 PERMAMPU: Resiliensi Perempuan Dan Kelompok Rentan Jadi Kunci Pemulihan," *Tribun-Medan.com*, 2025, <https://medan.tribunnews.com/nasional/1775325/catatan-akhir-tahun-2025-permampu-resiliensi-perempuan-dan-kelompok-rentan-jadi-kunci-pemulihan>.

<sup>3</sup> Cut Tasri Mirnalisa and Indra Martian Permana, *Feminisme Islam Dalam Sudut Pandang Aceh* (Bogor: Guepedia, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Rahman Malik, "Ikatan Kekerabatan Etnis Minangkabau Dalam Melestarikan Nilai Budaya Minangkabau Di Perantauan Sebagai Wujud Warga NKRI," *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 5, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an, Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2–6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139649759>.

<sup>6</sup> Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," *Https://Doi.Org/10.1086/375708* 29, no. 1 (2003): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/375708>.

risks delegitimizing women's immediate survival instincts, hindering autonomous self-rescue operations due to the cultural expectation of male validation.<sup>7</sup>

This research does not arise from a vacuum but stands upon and continues the academic dialectic examined by previous scholars. Broadly, the map of previous literature can be categorized into three main clusters. *First*, studies regarding the construction of gender hierarchy in exegesis refer to Karen Bauer's (2015) critical approach. Research in this cluster includes recent studies, such as the thesis written by M. Rizqi Nugraha AG.<sup>8</sup> His research used discourse analysis based on Bauer's spectrum to dismantle how Quraish Shihab, despite being classified as a moderate exegete, still retains residues of classical gender hierarchy construction in his interpretation. Although such research is important for mapping the reception of Bauer's theory in Indonesia, its focus is still limited to text-on-text criticism and the dialectics of figures' thoughts. Such research has not gone further to test how the hierarchical construction found in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* implies fatal consequences when faced with a real humanitarian crisis, an empirical gap that this research intends to fill.

*Second*, the discourse of ecofeminism popularized by Vandana Shiva<sup>9</sup> and contextualized in Indonesia by researchers like Dewi Candraningrum. This cluster focuses on the intersection between nature exploitation and domination over women's bodies, placing environmental destruction as a logical consequence of patriarchal culture.<sup>10</sup> From these ecofeminist studies, new research has emerged as a development of further studies on ecofeminism. *Third*, sociological studies regarding women and disasters (gender and disaster), as theorized by Elaine Enarson<sup>11</sup> and empirical findings by Oxfam post-Tsunami. Research in this typology consistently shows high physical vulnerability and mortality of women due to unequal social structures.

The position of this research exists at the intersection of textual hermeneutics, ecofeminism, and disaster studies. Rather than instrumentalizing Karen Bauer's historical-contextual analysis as empirical evidence to validate sociological disaster data, this study strictly utilizes it as an interpretive framework. While sociological and ecofeminist approaches evaluate the environmental and empirical impacts of the Sumatra floods, Bauer's lens is applied specifically to map the genealogy of the theological discourses that shape the victims' realities. By synthesizing these empirical realities with Bauer's hermeneutical framework, this research re-evaluates the rigid conceptualization of gender hierarchies. It proposes a reading where traditional gender roles often perceived, as absolute mandates that restrict women's autonomy, are understood as contextual, fluid, and functional constructs. Consequently, the implication of this interpretive shift encourages a more adaptive theological paradigm rather than a mere hierarchical restructuring. This paradigm affirms women as autonomous subjects possessing the full physical and intellectual competence for self-preservation. Ultimately, this approach opens a critical discursive space where women's religious legitimacy to exercise tactical agency and survival initiatives is recognized, especially when traditional male protection systems structurally collapse during crises.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses, Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2015), 110–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139649759>.

<sup>8</sup> M Rizqi Nugraha AG, "KONSTRUKSI HIERARKI GENDER DALAM TAFSIR AL-MISBAH ATAS QS. AN-NISA AYAT 34: ANALISIS WACANA DENGAN PENDEKATAN KAREN BAUER - Institutional Repository UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga , 2025), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/71691/>.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Mies Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism: Critique Influence Change*, 1st ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/ecofeminism-9781350379886/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dewi Candraningrum, *Ekoefeminisme I: Dalam Tafsir Agama, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Dan Budaya, Ekoefeminisme Dalam Tafsir Agama, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Dan Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Percetakan Jalasutra, 2013), <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/33118523-ekofeminisme-i>.

This research is classified as qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical nature, executed through library research methods. To avoid conceptual stretching and ensure methodological rigor, this study establishes a strict epistemic hierarchy among its data sources. The Qur'an is positioned as the fundamental normative text, while classical exegesis (*tafsir*) is treated as a historical-discursive product of human interpretation. Meanwhile, empirical field reports and media coverage from the Sumatra floods function strictly as sociological data to illustrate contemporary crisis contexts. Specifically, this research applies the historical-contextual approach developed by Karen Bauer to dissect the genealogy of gender exegesis. Rather than using empirical sociological data to 'test the validity' of sacred texts, this study brings Bauer's textual critique into dialogue with empirical realities to demonstrate the functional limitations of applying medieval exegetical frameworks to modern disaster management.

The research database is sourced from documentation tracing categorized into primary and secondary data. Theoretical primary data sources refer directly to the Qur'anic texts of Surah An-Nisa [4]: 34 and Al-Baqarah [2]: 282, as well as Karen Bauer's main work, *"Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Relying on God vs. Relying on Others"*. Meanwhile, empirical primary data is excavated from official documents, press releases, and situation reports published by the PERMAMPU Consortium regarding the impact of floods in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra in late 2025. As supporting data, this research also refers to classical exegesis literature, scientific journals, and reputable mass media archives recording field facts regarding the humanitarian crisis in the affected regions.

The data analysis is conducted using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) coupled with a critical hermeneutical approach. To ensure analytical rigor, the unit of analysis consists of specific textual segments, namely sentences and clauses extracted from classical tafsir literature regarding qawwamah, as well as narrative excerpts from the empirical disaster reports. The analytical procedure follows three systematic stages: thematic coding, critical contextualization, and synthesis. First, during the coding phase, the extracted data is systematically categorized into specific nodes, such as 'male protection dependency' and 'disaster-induced systemic paralysis.' Second, instead of employing deconstruction as a mere literary metaphor, the study operationalizes Karen Bauer's historical-contextual framework as a concrete analytical procedure. It systematically dismantles the medieval 'protection myth' by demonstrating how the material prerequisites for male guardianship completely collapse under modern force majeure conditions. Finally, the synthesis stage restructures a fluid theological paradigm, establishing women's autonomous survival agency as a religiously legitimized necessity during crises.

## Result and Discussion

### Karen Bauer's Construction of the Interpretive Approach

Analysis of women's vulnerability in disasters cannot be separated from the theological roots that shape social perceptions. This is empirically confirmed by Marjaana Jauhola in her study, *Scraps of Hope in Banda Aceh*, which found that in the post-tsunami reconstruction phase, religious narratives were often reconstituted to implement moral policing against women.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this study utilizes Karen Bauer's historical-contextual framework as the primary analytical tool to dismantle the genealogy of these narratives.

Bauer's reconstruction of gender interpretation stems from academic concerns regarding the stagnation of classical exegesis, which tended to freeze the relationship between men and women

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<sup>12</sup> Marjaana Jauhola, *Scraps of Hope in Banda Aceh: Gendered Urban Politics in the Aceh Peace Process*, Helsinki University Press (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.33134/PRO-ET-CONTRA-1>.

within a rigid power structure. Through a historical-contextual approach, Bauer attempts to dismantle the "architecture" of these interpretations to prove that gender hierarchy is not an absolute divine decree, but rather the result of interpreters' negotiations with their social realities.<sup>13</sup> Bauer observed that medieval commentators, such as Al-Tabari and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, did not interpret verses in a vacuum; rather, they projected the patriarchal social assumptions of the Abbasid era onto the Qur'anic text.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, gender hierarchy, a fluid social construct, was standardized as an eternal divine mandate. Consequently, gender hierarchy originally, a fluid social construct, was standardized as an eternal, static divine mandate. Through a diachronic analysis, Bauer traces how the textual flexibility of early Islam underwent historical ossification, ultimately shifting the theological orientation of human dependency. While the Qur'an principally teaches Tawakkal (Relying on God), hierarchical interpretations shifted this concept for women to "Relying on Men," conditioning them to believe that their safety is inherently tied to absolute male authority.<sup>15</sup>

However, to avoid treating Bauer's framework as an unquestioned dogma, her methodology must be critically situated within the broader academic debates of Islamic feminism. It is here that Aysha Hidayatullah's critique in *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* becomes paramount. Hidayatullah fiercely critiques early Muslim feminist approaches, such as that of Amina Wadud, for relying too heavily on linguistic-semantic egalitarianism and a "tawhidic paradigm." Wadud contends that the Qur'anic text is inherently egalitarian and that oppression stems purely from male-centric misreadings.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Hidayatullah demonstrates that Wadud's method ultimately hits a theoretical dead end. She points out that Wadud frequently engages in "forcible readings" to deny the reality that certain verses, most notably Q. 4:34, contain a "gender-hierarchical core." Ultimately, the impasse of this linguistic method compels Wadud to simply say "No" to the authority of the text when interpretive maneuvers can no longer reconcile it with gender justice.<sup>17</sup>

This fundamental limitation of the linguistic approach necessitates a more grounded epistemological deconstruction, which serves as the primary rationale for adopting Bauer's historical framework. Rather than imposing an egalitarian meaning onto verses that have been historically constructed as hierarchical, Bauer unpacks the historical formation of that hierarchy. This historical intervention gains further significance when juxtaposed with Adis Duderija's analysis. Duderija explains that the contemporary perpetuation of patriarchy is rooted in the Neo-Traditional Salafi (NTS) paradigm, a methodology that freezes textual meaning in the past, suppresses contextual rationality, and views history as a regressive process.<sup>18</sup> To dismantle this entrenched vulnerability, scholars cannot merely seek out "egalitarian verses" as Wadud does; they must deconstruct the traditionalist epistemology itself. Bauer's demonstration that classical consensus is a product of human negotiation rather than divine absolutism provides the precise theoretical mechanism needed to fracture the NTS paradigm identified by Duderija.<sup>19</sup>

By acknowledging these diverse academic contentions, this study deliberately adopts Bauer's diachronic framework not as an absolute theological truth, but as a critical methodological instrument. Furthermore, this study expands upon Bauer's largely text-bound critique by testing her theoretical

<sup>13</sup> Karen Bauer, "In Defense of Historical-Critical Analysis of the Qm'an," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 126–30, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.32.2.20>.

<sup>14</sup> Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*, 277–88.

<sup>15</sup> Bauer, *Gend. Hierarchy Qur'an*, 4–5.

<sup>16</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an And Women: Reading The Sacred Text From a Women's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Adis Duderija, *Constructing a Religiously Ideal "Believer" and "Woman" in Islam : Neo-Traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslims' Methods of Interpretation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230337862>.

<sup>19</sup> Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*.

premise against the empirical realities of the Sumatra flood disasters. When women are theologically conditioned to depend on male protection, this study examines the functional collapse of that paradigm when force majeure situations paralyze the "protectors" themselves.

### **Delegitimization of Theological Authority, Interpretation of Leaders and the Myth of Reason Deficiency**

Referring to Bauer's analysis, the construction of *Qawwamah* (leadership) in Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34 by classical commentators is not placed as an unconditional theological mandate, but rather depends on specific sociological causality. Classical commentators base male authority on two pillars, namely physical superiority (*faddala*) and the ability to provide for (*infaq*). In Islamic legal logic, the validity of a law is tied to the existence of a reason or not (*al-hukmu yaduru ma'a al-'illati wujūdan wa 'adaman*).<sup>20</sup>

According to Bauer, classical commentators agree that the 'illat (logical reason) of the *Qawwamah* mandate in Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34 is built on two pillars, namely the ability to provide *infaq* (living) and superior protection (*faddala*). The first pillar is the claim of Natural Capacity (*Fadl/Faddala*). Classical commentators build on the assumption that men naturally have physical superiority and rational reasoning that are superior to women. This construction is used to justify why men are "worthy" to lead. The second pillar is Functional Capacity (*Infaq*), namely the obligation of men to provide economic sustenance and physical protection. For Bauer, the disclosure of these two pillars is crucial because it shows that male authority is conditional, that is, it depends on the existence of physical superiority and financial ability.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of the flood disaster in Sumatra, when the 'illat (material and physical capabilities) were lost due to force majeure, then logically, according to Islamic law, the leadership mandate should also be forfeited ('adaman). Maintaining the husband's command structure when the husband himself experiences functional paralysis is a flawed form of logic in the *maqasid sharia* law that actually endangers the safety of the family (*hifz an-nafs*).

So, in the context of male leadership, when this material basis is lost, the legitimacy of that leadership becomes totally dysfunctional. Bauer highlights that the traditional gender hierarchy was built on the assumption of "normalcy" because it fit the social structure of the time, where men had access to resources and superior physical strength.<sup>22</sup> Classical interpretations failed to anticipate the current situation, which differed from the past, where men experienced "functional bankruptcy" due to both economic paralysis and physical helplessness. Thus, when a man is no longer able to fulfill his protective and financial functions, his status as absolute authority is automatically delegitimized. Maintaining a hierarchy based on a collapsed material basis is a form of theological coercion that has no rational basis in the text itself.

Beyond the physical-material aspect, the legitimacy of male dominance is also reinforced through the intellectual stigma stemming from the interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 282 (the verse on debt testimony). Bauer, in his historical investigation, discovered an extreme shift in meaning. The verse, originally revealed in the specific context of an oral trade culture where women were rarely involved in the marketplace, was reconstituted by medieval commentators into a permanent biological stigma.<sup>23</sup>

The phrase *an tadilla ibdaabuma* (if one of them forgets/mistakes) is pejoratively interpreted as the doctrine of *Nuqsan al-'Aql* (deficiency/lack of reason). This interpretation labels women as

<sup>20</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa Min 'Ilm Al-Usul*, Jilid 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*, 169–170.

<sup>22</sup> Bauer, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Bauer, 10.

emotional, forgetful, and lacking the cognitive capacity of men in decision-making. Using Bauer's approach, this study rejects this standard interpretation. Bauer proves that the "forgetfulness" or "mistake" in the verse is not an inherent characteristic of women, but rather a consequence of women's lack of social experience in the public sphere at that time.<sup>24</sup> At the time of revelation, markets and financial transactions in Medina were a male-dominated public domain, so women were rarely involved and understandably unfamiliar with the details of debt contracts. This limitation was essentially contextual-historical (due to lack of experience/access).

However, patriarchal interpretations transform this lack of familiarity into a lack of ability. The probabilistic nature of forgetfulness or error, described in the verse as "if one of them forgets," is frozen into a permanent characteristic of women, who are considered emotional and weak in reason (*nuqsan al-'aql*). As a result, a theological stigma is created that women, in any situation, lack the cognitive capacity to make precise decisions equal to men. If access to experience is opened, the argument for lack of ability is invalidated. Therefore, using this verse as evidence to limit women's agency in making strategic decisions is a fatal methodological error.

### Placing Bauer's Perspective in the Discourse of Gender and Disaster

Indonesia is a country that is very vulnerable to various types of natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods, and landslides.<sup>25</sup> A surge in the priority level of disaster events, which affect the socio-economic status and conditions as well as the vulnerability of various community groups, has occurred in recent decades, real examples of which are the tsunami in Aceh, 2004; the eruption of Mount Merapi, 2010; the tsunami in Palu, 2018; and the Sumatra flood disaster in 2025.<sup>26</sup> These events not only caused physical and economic damage, but also exposed different social vulnerabilities among different groups, particularly based on gender.<sup>27</sup> Gender factors are a focus that is often overlooked in disaster management and environmental management.<sup>28</sup>

Data from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) shows that women are 14 times more at risk than adult men in disaster situations. This is due to gender roles that place women more in the domestic sphere, so their access to disaster management information and resources is limited.<sup>29</sup> In addition, women often face additional challenges, such as an increased risk of gender-based violence in refugee camps and the double burden of caring for families during the recovery period. Gender is a concept that is socially and culturally constructed or not a biological construct, which refers to the social classification of 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles, expectations, values, and norms of society to distinguish non-physical traits between men and women.

In addition, women often face additional challenges, such as an increased risk of gender-based violence in refugee camps. Increased cases of violence have been recorded in several major disasters, such as in Aceh (2005-2006), Padang (2010), Central Sulawesi (2018-2019), and the Sumatra floods

<sup>24</sup> Bauer, 70–73.

<sup>25</sup> Riyanti Djalante, "Review of the Tsunami Disaster Risk Reduction in Indonesia," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 22 (2017): 1–9.

<sup>26</sup> "Kaleidoskop Bencana 2025: Banjir Bandang Dan Longsor Kepung Sumatera," Kompas.id, n.d.

<sup>27</sup> Elaine Enarson, *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2009), 45. This argument is strengthened by the report of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), Komnas Perempuan, *Perempuan Dalam Himpitan Krisis: Catatan Tahunan 2025* (Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan, 2026).

<sup>28</sup> Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Relying on God and Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12 (used as a theoretical basis for structural bias). See: Sarah Bradshaw, *Gender, Development and Disasters* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 22–24.

<sup>29</sup> Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB), *Peraturan Kepala Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana Nomor 13 Tahun 2014 Tentang Pengarusutamaan Gender Di Bidang Penanggulangan Bencana* (Jakarta: BNPB, 2014).

(2025).<sup>30</sup> Gender-based violence poses a serious threat to women and girls, both before and during disasters. Gender issues are not only related to women's greater vulnerability during disasters, but also to their vulnerability to post-disaster conditions. This is evident in the violence experienced by women victims of the Sumatran floods (West Sumatra, North Sumatra, and Aceh). What should have been a safe space for mental recovery after such a devastating disaster has, instead, only increased the mental burden and profound trauma for women.

History has shown an increase in women's insecurity during disasters. As noted by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), in 2002, it reported several cases of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies, including systematic acts of violence during the Aceh conflict of 1989-1998. The victims were women, with at least 20 cases involving sexual violence, discrimination, and sexual exploitation. In 2006, a report from the Community Support Center (CSC) to UNFPA Indonesia indicated that during the tsunami response in Aceh, there were at least 97 cases of gender-based violence. Furthermore, in its final report for the 2010 earthquake response in Padang, UNFPA Indonesia also stated that there were three cases of rape in refugee camps for earthquake victims in Padang, West Sumatra.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the latest report from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), released in late 2025 and early 2026, stated that cases of violence against women during the Sumatran disaster (West Sumatra, North Sumatra, and Aceh) from November to December increased.<sup>32</sup> Such cases include cases of sexual, physical, and verbal harassment in refugee camps that occurred in public toilets and densely populated tents, due to the lack of separate safe spaces; dark/open toilets for men and women. Then there are cases of domestic violence and post-disaster stress. Factors include the husband's economic stress projected onto his wife (Bauer's Emotional History theory). Furthermore, there is neglect of women's special needs, such as the scarcity of sanitary napkins and access to reproductive health. This occurs due to masculine disaster management, meaning that logistics only focus on rice or noodles, forgetting women's needs.

This vulnerability is often misunderstood by the general public, with disasters viewed not only as natural phenomena but also as theological ones. Unfortunately, post-disaster religious interpretations are often gender-biased. Women are often used as symbols of community morality; when disaster strikes, women are often the first to be blamed (for example, because women's dress code ultimately invites disaster). This phenomenon is evident from the 2004 Aceh Tsunami to the more recent 2025 Sumatra Floods, where social pressure on women increases as society loses its sense of security. This is where Karen Bauer's thinking becomes crucial. In her work, *\*Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an\** (2015), Bauer offers an analytical tool to dissect how interpreters' social and emotional biases enter into religious understanding.

Following the 2025 Sumatra Flood disaster, field reports indicate an increase in the domestication of women in refugee camps and a religious narrative that marginalizes female victims.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Siaran Pers Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB), "Laporan Situasi Bencana Banjir Sumatera: Kerentanan Perempuan Di Titik Pengungsian," Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB), n.d.

<sup>31</sup> Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (KemenPPPA), *Data Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan Dan Anak Pada Situasi Darurat Bencana Banjir Sumatera 2025* (Jakarta: KemenPPPA, 2026).

<sup>32</sup> Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan (Komnas Perempuan), "Siaran Pers: Darurat Kekerasan Di Wilayah Bencana Sumatera Akhir Tahun," Komnas Perempuan, 2026.

<sup>33</sup> Koalisi Masyarakat Sipil untuk Penanggulangan Bencana, *Laporan Pemantauan Hak Asasi Manusia Dan Gender: Respons Banjir Sumatera 2025* (Padang: Walhi Sumatera Barat & Jaringan Perempuan, 2025). This report notes that there were appeals from traditional/religious leaders at several refugee camps that restricted women's mobility on the grounds of "maintaining morality so that the disaster would not recur."



Using Bauer's lens, this phenomenon can be explained as emotional projection. Bauer explains that in the history of interpretation, restrictions on women are often driven by men's fear of losing social control. Bauer specifically discusses how classical commentators often injected their social anxieties into the interpretation of verses, creating laws that were more restrictive than the original text of the Qur'an itself.<sup>34</sup> Natural disasters are situations of ultimate chaos in which men lose control over property and protection. To regain a sense of "control," society unconsciously disciplines the element considered most vulnerable yet symbolic: the female body. Bauer's theory helps us understand that the narrative "Disasters are Punishment for women's sins" is not a theological truth, but rather a psychological defense mechanism of a patriarchal society in panic.

The concept of *Qiwamah* (men as absolute protectors/leaders) often hinders women in disaster mitigation. For example, women are evacuated late because they wait for their husbands' permission, or logistical aid is channeled only through the male head of the family. Bauer critiques the rigid and ahistorical interpretation of *Qiwamah*. She points out that in the Quran, gender roles can be fluid depending on context and capacity.<sup>35</sup> In emergencies, traditional hierarchies often collapse (men can be injured or killed). Maintaining rigid hierarchies in these circumstances contradicts the basic sharia principle of *hifz al-nafs* (protecting life). Bauer's perspective legitimizes women to take on leadership roles (agency) in evacuation centers, such as coordinating public kitchens or distributing logistics without feeling they violate religious principles.<sup>36</sup>

Bauer argues that masculine interpretations tend to ignore women's bodily experiences. Because decision-makers (past interpreters or current disaster managers) are predominantly male, they design rules or systems based on their own bodily experiences. "Gender-blind" disaster management (focusing solely on food logistics while neglecting sexual safety) is a legacy of a worldview that positions men's experiences as the universal standard. Therefore, placing Karen Bauer's perspective within the discourse on gender and disaster provides crucial insight, as women's vulnerability is not destiny, but rather a construct. Bauer teaches us to dare to distinguish between God's just message and the biases of patriarchal interpreters. In the context of disaster-prone Indonesia, this implies the need to formulate a "Gender-Responsive Disaster Theology."<sup>37</sup> This theology no longer seeks scapegoats in women's bodies, but rather encourages women's active participation as equal subjects in building community resilience. Saving lives in disasters must be placed above traditional gender hierarchies.

Field evidence from the 2025 Sumatra floods shows that women were victims of abuse not because their "morality" invited disaster, but because disaster management failed to provide safe and closed toilets.<sup>38</sup> This is a structural failure, not a spiritual failure for women. Disasters are often understood as neutral and impartial natural events. However, in the development of contemporary social studies, this view is starting to be abandoned. Various studies show that the impact of disasters is not experienced equally by all groups in society, but is heavily influenced by pre-existing social, economic, cultural, and power structures<sup>39</sup>. One important aspect of these structures is gender.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Bauer, "Emotion in the Qur'an: An Overview," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2017): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2017.0282>.

<sup>35</sup> Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, *Fikih Kebencanaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, 2015). This book emphasizes that in emergency situations (*dharurat*), saving lives (*hifz al-nafs*) is the top priority that goes beyond ordinary socio-normative rules, including the limitations of gender roles.

<sup>36</sup> Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*, 260.

<sup>37</sup> Muh Yunus, Andi Tenri, and Aziz Thaba, "Evaluation of Gender Variables in Disaster Management Systems in Indonesia," *Environment and Ecology Research* 10, no. 5 (2022): 572–79, <https://doi.org/10.13189/eer.2022.100505>.

<sup>38</sup> Yayasan Keadilan dan Perdamaian Indonesia (YKPI), "Siaran Pers: Paling Terdampak Bencana, Perempuan Korban Banjir Aceh-Sumatra Rentan Alami Kekerasan," YKPI, n.d.

<sup>39</sup> Elaine Enarson, *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives*.

Gender and disaster studies emphasize that gender is not simply a biological category, but a social construct that determines the roles, responsibilities, access to resources, and bargaining power of individuals in society. In the context of disasters, this gender construct contributes to different levels of vulnerability and capacity between men and women, as well as other gender groups. Differences in access to information, health services, humanitarian assistance, and decision-making are clear examples of how gender influences the experiences of individuals and groups when facing disasters.

In line with Prof. Siti Musdah Mulia's view, narratives that corner women as the cause of disasters are a dangerous diversion.<sup>40</sup> The real problem, as frequently voiced by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), lies in gender-blind refugee infrastructure, such as the lack of adequate sanitation, which systematically places women vulnerable to sexual violence, not because of their morality, but because of the absence of state protection.

On the other hand, thinking about gender cannot be separated from the value systems, cultural norms, and even religious interpretations that exist within society. In this regard, Karen Bauer's thinking is relevant to study. Bauer, through her in-depth study of gender constructions in the Qur'an and the Islamic exegetical tradition, emphasizes that understandings of gender are always intertwined with specific social, historical, and power-structure contexts. She demonstrates that gender differences are often understood through social and cultural lenses, rather than solely determined by religious texts themselves.

### **Towards Equity-Based Resilience**

Building equity-based resilience in disaster zones necessitates a rigorous epistemological separation between universal "sacred texts" and the oppressive "cultural constructs" that have ossified within the exegetical tradition. Grounded in Karen Bauer's framework, gender hierarchy within Islamic intellectual history is not a static divine mandate, but rather the product of context-bound social power negotiations. When this hierarchical construct is rigidly maintained amidst ecological crises, as evidenced by the phenomenon of structural *qawwamah* dysfunction during the Sumatra floods, it directly exacerbates female vulnerability. Proceeding from this deconstructive premise, breaking the chain of systemic vulnerability requires more than theoretical critique; it demands actionable intervention. Consequently, this research formulates three operational strategies focused on reconstructing the theological understanding of male guardianship (*qawwamah*) and restoring the legitimacy of women's reasoning capacity (vis-à-vis the verses on testimony and *nuqsan al-'aql*), thereby establishing a just and resilient disaster theology.

As the primary operational strategy, the reconstruction of the safety paradigm in disaster management necessitates a fundamental transformation that extends far beyond technical logistical aid. Based on the documented failure of protection triggered by structural *qawwamah* dysfunction, a crucial first step involves executing an epistemological deconstruction of the Neo-Traditional Salafi (NTS) methodology, which has historically frozen gender roles within the domestic sphere. By operationalizing Karen Bauer's historical-contextual approach, disaster-affected communities can begin to discern that classical texts regarding female subordination are not absolute theological decrees, but rather the products of past social negotiations that are no longer compatible with force majeure scenarios. More specifically, Bauer's diachronic analysis dismantles the classical claims of male authority by revealing how they rest upon the premise of established spatial-material stability. When natural disasters obliterate the domestic space and paralyze the economic capabilities of the protector, the sociological assumptions underlying the legal validity of medieval exegesis automatically lose their

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<sup>40</sup> Siti Musdah Mulia, "Melawan Fundamentalisme: Memanusiakan Perempuan," *AL-KAINAH: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.69698/jis.v1i1.3>.

ontological basis. Therefore, building an equitable resilience must commence with restoring women's theological agency, liberating them from the trap of a fatal dependency on male authority that becomes structurally paralyzed during ecological crises.

Furthermore, this conceptual transformation must be concretely manifested through the repositioning of women within disaster management structures, particularly within evacuation centers and displacement camps. Empirical evidence from the Sumatra flood disasters demonstrates that when male protection collapses, women independently organize logistical distribution and execute tactical risk-mitigation strategies. This field reality directly shatters the historical stigma regarding women's intellectual deficiency (*nuqsan al-'aql*). This empirical transformation epistemologically shifts the discourse of *nuqsan al-'aql* from the realm of rigid biological essentialism to that of sociological-contextual construction. The resilience and competence demonstrated by women in navigating camp crises prove that intellectual and managerial capacities are not gender-bound fixed variables, but adaptive capabilities that have long been suppressed by the confinement of traditional interpretations within domestic spaces. Consequently, disaster policy authorities are obligated to eliminate systematic gender biases in emergency governance and begin integrating women's managerial capacities into mainstream decision-making pipelines. Recognizing these intellectual and practical capacities is not merely a fulfillment of social rights, but a rational ecological adaptation strategy designed to minimize mortality rates among vulnerable populations.

Ultimately, genuine resilience can only be achieved when destructive, unilateral dependency is systematically replaced by an equitable model of strategic partnership between men and women. Within this framework of a "Gender-Responsive Disaster Theology," safety is no longer defined as a patriarchal privilege granted by a protector, but as a collective responsibility rooted in mutual competence. This newly constructed theological framework radically alters the legal status (*hukm*) of women's autonomous self-rescue actions, elevating them from a mere emergency concession (*rukhsah*) to an absolute, binding legal obligation (*'azimah*). Normalizing independent self-rescue agency for women serves as a direct embodiment of the highest principle of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, which is *hifz al-nafs* (the preservation of life). Through this theological synergy that positions women as autonomous, active subjects, societies in disaster-prone zones will not only possess a more robust physical resilience, but also an equitable theological foundation to withstand future environmental crises.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the acute vulnerability of women during the 2025 Sumatra floods is not solely a product of natural ecological collapse, but is deeply intertwined with internalized medieval theological constructs. By operationalizing Karen Bauer's historical-contextual framework, it becomes evident that the classical mandate of *qanwamah* is not an absolute divine decree, but a conditional authority inherently dependent on material maintenance (*infaq*) and physical protection (*faddala*). In the specific context of disaster, such as the *force majeure* scenario observed in Sumatra where these material prerequisites completely vanish, the rigid adherence to male guardianship loses its functional and legal legitimacy. It must be noted, however, that these qualitative findings are methodologically bound to extreme crises and do not seek to universally invalidate traditional family structures in normative settings, but rather highlight the fatal consequences of structural *qanwamah* dysfunction during emergencies.

Furthermore, the persistent stigma of female intellectual deficiency (*nuqsan al-'aql*) is exposed in this empirical setting as an ahistorical fallacy that dangerously hinders women's survival agency. Consequently, maintaining a strict gender hierarchy during crises directly contradicts the fundamental

*maqasid* principle of *hifẓ al-nafs* (preservation of life). Based on these contextual parameters, this research advocates for a critical paradigm shift towards a "Gender-Responsive Disaster Theology". In this proposed paradigm, the fatal dependency on male protection must be systematically replaced by strategic partnership, fully recognizing women as autonomous subjects equipped with both the religious and intellectual legitimacy to initiate critical self-rescue operations in disaster zones.

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