



Representation of Women's Reproductive Health in Quraish Shihab's Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of Quranic verses related to women's reproductive health, specifically the themes of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, in his Tafsir al-Misbah. These four themes were chosen because they represent important phases in the female reproductive cycle that have direct implications for physical, psychological, and social health. Using a thematic interpretation analysis approach, this study finds that Quraish Shihab emphasizes the balance between the normative values of the Quran and the practical needs of modern life. On the theme of menstruation, he emphasizes the wisdom of sharia that maintains women's hygiene and health. In discussing pregnancy and childbirth, Quraish highlights the difficult struggles of a mother as a form of respect for women's roles. Meanwhile, on the theme of breastfeeding, he emphasizes the importance of children's rights as well as the moral obligation of fathers and the community to provide support. The relevance of Quraish Shihab's interpretation shows that the Quran pays significant attention to women's reproductive health issues, not only within a biological framework but also within ethical, social, and family contexts. This article contributes to demonstrating how contemporary interpretations can serve as a reference in formulating discourse on women's reproductive health and justice in the modern era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's reproductive health has become a central theme in contemporary discourse that discusses the relationship between religion, gender, and the dynamics of modern society. The Qur'an, as the holy book of Muslims, pays close attention to the biological and social experiences of women. This is reflected in its discussion of the crucial phases of reproduction, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. These four phases are not merely understood as biological processes but also contain complex moral, legal, and social dimensions. The interpretation of these verses has a significant impact on determining women's position within the family and wider society. Furthermore, reproductive health issues often serve as a gateway to debates about women's rights, men's responsibilities, and the equitable distribution of roles. Therefore, the study of this theme goes beyond medical or biological aspects to theological, ethical, and cultural aspects that influence daily life (Ropiah, 2025). Therefore, the study of these themes is relevant not only for understanding the normative messages of the Qur'an but also for addressing the challenges of women's reproductive health in the modern era.

Women's reproductive health is a comprehensive condition encompassing physical, psychological, and social aspects closely related to their biological functions and reproductive roles. This concept not only highlights women's ability to carry out biological processes such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, but also addresses their mental well-being and quality of life. Understanding reproductive health is crucial because it concerns women's basic rights to information, health services, and protection from discriminatory and harmful cultural practices. Furthermore, reproductive health is also linked to awareness of the importance of maintaining hygiene, access to health facilities, and social and family support. Therefore, reproductive health cannot be viewed solely as a medical matter, but also as part of efforts to enhance women's dignity, strengthen gender equality, and ensure the continuation of a healthy and quality generation (Agustin et al., 2023).

The four main phases of a woman's reproductive life—menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding—are interconnected and influence a woman's overall quality of life. Menstruation marks the beginning of reproductive function and also has implications for religious practices and social relationships. Pregnancy is a crucial period fraught with physical, psychological, and emotional risks, requiring support from family and the surrounding community. Childbirth is the culmination of the reproductive process, fraught with challenges, pain, and threats to safety, but also marks the birth of a new generation. Meanwhile, breastfeeding plays a crucial role in building an emotional bond between mother and child, in addition to supporting the baby's health and the mother's recovery. This entire cycle cannot be viewed in isolation but as a unified whole. Thus, these four phases are not only biological but also imbued with spiritual, social, and cultural values that influence women's roles in the family and society (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

In the tradition of interpretation in the Indonesian archipelago, M. Quraish Shihab, through his work *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, occupies a very important position as an example of modern interpretation that seeks to present the message of the Qur'an in simple, communicative language, and relevant to the realities of contemporary life. This interpretation does not only focus on explaining the literal meaning of the verses, but also emphasizes the connection of the Qur'an's message to the actual problems faced by the diverse Indonesian society. This approach makes *Tafsir Al-Misbah* have high practical value, because it is able to bridge the sacred text with a dynamic social context. One of the things that makes this work interesting to study is its relatively large attention to issues related to women, including reproductive health. Quraish Shihab presents an interpretation that is based on the principles of moderation, balance, and efforts to harmonize between normative texts and the socio-cultural needs of society (N. R. Aisyah, 2025).

Quraish Shihab, in his interpretation, comprehensively addresses the themes of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, not merely within the framework of law or religious ritual. Menstruation is understood as a biological process that requires a wise sharia perspective and social empathy, not merely stigma. Pregnancy is portrayed as a significant trust that demands the full attention, respect, and support of family and society. Childbirth is positioned as the culmination of a woman's physical and emotional struggle, deserving of respect, while breastfeeding is seen not only as a mother's obligation but also as a child's right that must be supported by the responsibility of the father and the social community (Ropiah, 2025). This interpretation emphasizes the importance of balanced roles within the family, so that women are not seen as bearing the entire burden of reproduction alone. Through his interpretation, Quraish Shihab presents a perspective that emphasizes respect for women's dignity, gender equity, and physical and psychological health. Thus, reproductive themes are not merely personal, but also part of society's social and moral responsibilities.

Quraish Shihab's perspective demonstrates that women's reproductive issues, from an Islamic perspective, cannot be separated from a broader social ethical framework. He asserts that the Quran calls for justice and balance in relations between men and women, including within the family. Therefore, reproductive responsibility is not solely the responsibility of women but must also be supported by the active involvement of husbands and community support. Thus, biological processes such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding are no longer viewed merely as women's domestic affairs, but rather as part of a collective trust with spiritual and social value. This interpretation also opens up space for a healthier, fairer, and more humane discourse on women's empowerment. It is crucial to emphasize that contextual religious interpretation can serve as an instrument of liberation, so that women are no longer positioned as objects, but as subjects with full rights over their bodies and lives (Hidayat et al., 2025).

This study focuses on a thematic analysis of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* related to the discussion of women's reproductive health, particularly in four important phases that are part of women's biological and social experiences. This focus is based on the characteristics of Quraish Shihab's interpretation, which not only highlights legal issues but also integrates broader moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Thus, his interpretation is able to offer an understanding that is not rigid, but relevant to the realities of modern society. The study of these four main themes is expected to demonstrate how a contemporary exegete responds to women's issues with a contextual, moderate approach, while

remaining grounded in the principles of the Qur'an. The results of this study are expected not only to enrich the discourse of interpretation in the archipelago but also to contribute to the discourse on gender and religion from an Islamic scholarly perspective.

This study is crucially relevant because women's reproductive health issues are often influenced by cultural biases and narrow religious interpretations. However, the Qur'an actually provides a normative foundation that emphasizes respect and appreciation for women as individuals who play a central role in human survival. By examining Quraish Shihab's interpretation in Tafsir Al-Misbah, this study seeks to demonstrate how the Qur'an can be interpreted more openly and contextually. This interpretation emphasizes that the sacred text does not limit women's roles but rather provides space for liberating, healthy, and empowering interpretations. Specifically on reproductive issues, Quraish Shihab presents a moderate perspective that positions women not as passive objects but as subjects possessing dignity, rights, and responsibilities. Thus, this study emphasizes the Qur'an's potential as a source of progressive social ethics.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Tafsir Al-Misbah

M. Quraish Shihab is one of Indonesia's contemporary commentators who has had a significant influence on the development of Qur'anic studies in the archipelago. He was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi, on February 16, 1944, into a family of scholars with a strong tradition of Islamic scholarship. His father, Prof. Abdurrahman Shihab, was widely known as a scholar and educator who played a key role in pioneering Islamic education in Eastern Indonesia. This family environment, steeped in religious and intellectual values, fostered Quraish's love of Islamic studies, particularly Qur'anic studies, from an early age. He received his primary education in Ujung Pandang before continuing his studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. In 1967, he completed his undergraduate program in Tafsir and Hadith. Two years later, in 1969, he earned his master's degree in Qur'anic Tafsir and Ulumul Qur'an. His academic career further strengthened after completing his doctoral program in 1982, with a dissertation entitled "Nazm al-Durar li al-Biq'a'i: Tahqiq wa Dirasah," which critically examined a classic work of tafsir. With his in-depth educational background and extensive academic experience, Quraish Shihab established himself as one of the most authoritative exegetes in Indonesia. His thinking was recognized not only nationally but also internationally. Through his works, he successfully introduced a contextual, moderate interpretation that was close to the needs of modern society (Faisal, 2022).

After returning from Egypt, Quraish Shihab was actively involved in academics, research, and bureaucracy. He was entrusted with serving as Rector of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta from 1992 to 1998, then appointed Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 1998, and assigned as Indonesian Ambassador to Egypt from 1999 to 2002. However, Quraish Shihab's greatest legacy lies not in his political or diplomatic activities, but in his contribution to the development of Qur'anic interpretations that are relevant to the dynamics of the times. Through his thoughts and works, he presents a calm, inclusive, and moderate face of Islam, making it easily accepted by the pluralistic Indonesian society. From an intellectual perspective, Quraish Shihab's productivity is considered very high. He has written more than 40 works, most of which are directly related to Qur'anic studies. Some of his popular works include "Grounding the Qur'an," "Qur'anic Insight," "Lanterna Hati," and "He Is Everywhere: God's Hand Behind Every Phenomenon." However, his most monumental work is "Tafsir Al-Misbah," a masterwork that systematically and profoundly interprets the Qur'an. Through these books, Quraish Shihab seeks to explore the universal message of the Qur'an and relate it to humanitarian issues and contemporary realities (Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Quraish Shihab's works serve not only as academic reading but also as practical references for the wider community in understanding Islamic teachings contextually. His communicative, systematic, and rationally reasoned interpretive style makes the message of the Quran more easily understood by various groups, including the younger generation living in the midst of modernity. Through Tafsir Al-Misbah, he emphasizes the importance of understanding the Quran by taking into account the social and cultural contexts and the needs of the diverse Indonesian Muslim community. His sensitivity to contemporary issues, such as democracy, tolerance, pluralism, and women's rights, makes his thinking timeless. Furthermore, Quraish Shihab's role in the mass media, both through television, radio, and popular writing, further expands his influence. He is able to bridge the gap between academic discourse and the spiritual needs of the general public. Thus, his intellectual legacy not only enriches the treasury of Nusantara interpretation but also strengthens the image of Indonesian Islam as a friendly, moderate, and solution-oriented religion.

Tafsir Al-Misbah, Messages, Impressions, and Harmony of the Qur'an is a major work by M. Quraish Shihab consisting of 15 volumes and first published in 2000 through Lentera Hati Publishers. The name Al-Misbah, which

means "lamp," was chosen as a symbol that this interpretation is expected to be a light for Muslims in understanding the Qur'an amidst the problems of modern life. In his interpretation, Quraish Shihab uses the tahlili method with a thematic-integrative approach, namely interpreting verses according to the order of the mushaf while connecting them with major themes and social relevance. This interpretation style is predominantly adabi-ijtima'i because it emphasizes moral, social, and community messages. The language used is communicative, straightforward, and easy to understand so that it can reach academics and the general public. One of the important characteristics of Al-Misbah is the effort to contextualize the message of the Qur'an with contemporary reality. Quraish Shihab links the text with current issues such as women's issues, democracy, pluralism, tolerance, and social ethics, so that this interpretation not only explains the meaning of the verse, but also provides practical guidance in everyday life (Nurchakim, 2025).

Moderation is a prominent characteristic of Quraish Shihab's interpretation. He consistently maintains a middle ground: he adheres to the text but also adheres to the normative principles of the Quran. This moderate stance is evident in his emphasis on the values of tolerance, justice, deliberation, and public welfare. Furthermore, Al-Misbah places significant emphasis on the concept of munāsabah, the harmony between verses and surahs, as Quraish Shihab believes that the arrangement of verses in the Mushaf has meaning and interconnectedness. Significant attention is also evident in women's issues, where Quraish Shihab interprets the themes of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and gender relations from a moderate perspective. He acknowledges the biological differences between men and women but emphasizes the equal dignity of both. With these characteristics, Tafsir Al-Misbah represents a contextual interpretation that can address the needs of modern Indonesian Muslims while presenting a friendly, inclusive, and relevant face of Islam (Aisa, 2024).

Thus, the moderation in Quraish Shihab's interpretation is not only methodological but also applicable in addressing contemporary socio-religious issues. He presents Islam as a religion that does not isolate itself from the developments of the times, but remains committed to the universal values of the Quran. His approach emphasizes that interpretation is not merely an academic product but also an ethical guideline relevant to community life. Therefore, Al-Misbah is often referred to in Islamic discourse in Indonesia, both in academic circles, da'wah, and public policy. Through his interpretation, Shihab encourages the community to be open, prioritize dialogue, and reject exclusive attitudes that can lead to conflict. This moderate character also enables Al-Misbah to bridge classical traditions and modern needs, so that the message of the Quran remains alive and grounded. With this style, this interpretation not only enriches the treasury of knowledge but also strengthens the foundations of a tolerant and humanistic Islam.

2.2. Quraish Shihab's Interpretation of Verses on the Theme of Women's Reproductive Health

Quraish Shihab's interpretation of Quranic verses relating to women's reproductive health makes a significant contribution to contemporary exegetical discourse in Indonesia. Through Tafsir Al-Misbah, he seeks to present a contextual understanding by emphasizing the values of welfare, justice, and respect for women's dignity. Reproductive themes such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding are explained not only from the perspective of religious law but also from social, moral, and health perspectives. With this approach, Quraish Shihab demonstrates that the Quran can be read in a liberating and healthy way, while also being relevant to the realities of modern life.

First, menstruation. In Tafsir Al-Misbah, Quraish Shihab interprets menstruation not solely as a biological issue, but also as a phenomenon with sharia, social, and psychological implications. He emphasizes that menstruation is a natural condition experienced by women, so it should not be viewed as a disgrace or stigma. From an Islamic legal perspective, menstruation does affect the performance of certain religious obligations, but this does not diminish a woman's dignity before Allah. Quraish Shihab encourages society to understand menstruation with empathy, so that women receive respect, protection, and support, not discrimination, both within the family and social spheres (Gaol et al., 2023). The verse that is the focus of the discussion on menstruation is QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 222:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ ۖ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَأَعْتَزِلُوا النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّى يَطْهُرْنَ ۖ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"They ask you (Prophet Muhammad) about menstruation. Say, 'It is an impurity.' So, stay away from women (from intercourse) during menstruation and do not approach them (to have intercourse) until they are pure (after the obligatory bath), mingle with them according to (the provisions) that Allah has commanded you. Indeed, Allah loves those who repent and those who purify themselves."

Quraish Shihab begins his interpretation by explaining the context in which the verses concerning menstruation were revealed. In pre-Islamic times, particularly in Jewish tradition, menstruating women were treated with great discrimination. They were considered totally unclean and therefore subjected to isolation, exclusion from domestic life, and some even separated from their homes. This contrasts with some Arab societies, which trivialized the issue of menstruation. Women were still encouraged to engage in sexual relations even while menstruating, without regard for health or hygiene. Through this verse, the Quran offers a just and wise middle ground. Menstruation is understood not as a disgrace that demeans women, but as a natural biological process that must be respected. At the same time, the Quran emphasizes the importance of maintaining cleanliness, health, and the spiritual values that accompany this phase, so that women's dignity remains respected (Mulia, 2011).

According to Quraish Shihab, the term *adza* (أَذَى) in this verse is not merely understood as physical "impurity," but rather encompasses biological conditions that can cause discomfort for both women and their partners. Menstrual blood is not absolutely impure in the Islamic sense that causes shame, but rather part of a natural bodily process that has certain functions and health impacts. Therefore, the prohibition against "approaching" a menstruating woman in this verse is understood specifically as a prohibition on sexual relations, not a prohibition on social interaction. Menstruating women can still communicate, socialize, and carry out normal activities with their families without being ostracized. This interpretation emphasizes that the Qur'an brings a more moderate, balanced approach and respects the dignity of women, in contrast to previous traditions that tended to discriminate against or belittle the condition of menstruation (Dewi, 2019).

Quraish Shihab emphasized that the verses about menstruation were not intended to demean women, but rather as a form of protection and respect. Menstruation is a natural phase characterized by hormonal changes and certain physical conditions, so it is natural for sharia to limit sexual activity to maintain women's health and the cleanliness of their partners. This emphasis on the medical aspect demonstrates that Shihab's interpretation is based on a rational and contextual approach, in line with modern scientific views that understand menstruation as a normal biological process that requires attention and empathy, not stigma or discrimination (Fitri et al., 2025). Shihab emphasized the importance of understanding the socio-cultural context when interpreting verses about women, including menstruation. At the time of the revelation of the Quran, some societies treated menstruating women with discrimination, even to the point of ostracizing them. The presence of the verse actually corrects this erroneous practice, by emphasizing that women retain an honorable status and equal rights in social and spiritual activities, even while menstruating. Thus, this interpretation conveys a message of gender justice and provides a normative foundation for the creation of healthy relationships between men and women in everyday life.

Quraish Shihab emphasized the importance of understanding the phrase "when they are pure" (*fa idzā tathhumna*) in the context of the verse about menstruation. He explained that classical scholars interpreted this phrase in two ways: first, purity is understood to occur after menstrual bleeding stops; second, purity is considered complete after performing a ritual bath. Shihab tends to prefer the second interpretation because it is more in line with the Islamic principle of *tahārah*, which emphasizes the importance of physical and spiritual cleanliness simultaneously. According to him, obligatory bathing is not merely a ritual formality, but a means of maintaining physical health while preparing oneself spiritually to return to performing worship with devotion. This approach demonstrates that sharia takes into account the medical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of women, so that worship can be performed in optimal conditions. Shihab's interpretation presents a rational, contextual understanding that aligns with the goal of sharia to safeguard the welfare of the community.

In the social sphere, Quraish Shihab emphasized that the Quran was created to eradicate pre-Islamic discriminatory practices that demeaned menstruating women. Before Islam, they were often ostracized, considered unclean, and even treated as a burden. Shihab asserted that the Quran corrects this view by emphasizing the full dignity of women. The only restriction is the prohibition of sexual intercourse during menstruation, which is intended not as a form of discrimination but for the common good, both in terms of physical health and domestic harmony. Thus, Islam is presented as a just and moderate religion, while also emphasizing the importance of reciprocity in relations between men and women. This interpretation demonstrates how Islam restores women's dignity from past inhumane treatment while also affirming the principles of equality and respect in social life (Hermanto, 2022).

Shihab also highlighted the closing verse: "Indeed, Allah loves those who repent and loves those who purify themselves." According to him, this passage conveys the message that the discussion of menstruation is not only related to the body, but also touches on spiritual aspects. Purifying oneself through obligatory bathing symbolizes one's readiness to draw closer to Allah. Menstruation, therefore, should not be viewed as something demeaning, but rather as a natural process that serves as a reminder of the blessings of the body and the importance of maintaining health and cleanliness (Nisak & Asmanto, 2023). Overall, Shihab's interpretation presents a rational, moderate, and contextual approach. It does not stop at the legal aspect alone, but also touches on the biological,

social, moral, and spiritual aspects. Menstruation is understood as a natural phenomenon that requires respect and empathy, not stigma or discrimination. The main message of this interpretation is respect for women as dignified human beings, as well as an invitation to build healthy, harmonious families based on gender justice (Nurcholish, 2015).

Second, Pregnancy. One phase of a woman's life that receives special attention in the Qur'an is pregnancy. Surah Luqman reveals the immense struggle of a mother, from conception to weaning. This verse not only emphasizes the biological aspects of pregnancy, which are fraught with risks and hardships, but also highlights Islam's appreciation for the sacrifices women make in their role as mothers. Pregnancy is seen as a great trust that demands attention, responsibility, and support from the family and society at large. Thus, the Qur'an emphasizes that the welfare of the mother and child must be a priority, while also instilling the values of empathy, respect, and social solidarity. The interpretation of this verse emphasizes that the role of women in the process of new life is not merely biological, but also social and spiritual, so that every effort to maintain the health, comfort, and dignity of the mother is part of fulfilling the principles of justice and compassion in Islam. Among the verses that directly touch on pregnancy is Surah Luqman [31]: 14:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

"We bequeath to man (to do good) to his parents. His mother conceived him in an increasingly weak condition and weaned him in two years.598) (Our Bequest,) "Be thankful to Me and to your parents." Only to Me (you) return."

According to Quraish Shihab, the verse about pregnancy in QS. Luqmān [31]:14 presents a picture that is not only realistic, but also has a poetic nuance regarding the struggle of a mother in carrying her child. The wording of the verse uses the word *hamalathu* (carrying her) is juxtaposed with the phrase *wahnan 'alā wahnin* ("weak upon weak"). This phrase, according to Shihab, carries a profound meaning about the accumulation of physical and psychological weaknesses experienced by a mother throughout pregnancy. This phrase is not merely a biological explanation, but rather a moral and spiritual emphasis that the process of pregnancy is a difficult phase that should be respected, appreciated, and not underestimated. Shihab interprets this phrase from two perspectives. First, from a biological perspective, pregnancy lasts approximately nine months and is filled with major changes in a woman's body. Pregnant women face hormonal changes, pain, nausea, fatigue, and even limited mobility. In fact, under certain conditions, pregnancy can present serious health risks that threaten the safety of both mother and fetus. Second, from a psychological perspective, the mother also bears a significant emotional burden. She feels anxiety, hope, and a great responsibility for the new life developing in her womb. All these layers of exhaustion are summarized in the expression *wahnan 'alā wahnin*, which describes how hard a mother's struggle is (R. D. Aisyah & Prafitri, 2024).

Quraish Shihab then connected this verse with QS. al-Aḥqaf [46]:15 which mentions that "his mother conceived him with difficulty, gave birth to him with difficulty, and carried him until weaning him for thirty months." By comparing the two verses, Shihab concluded that the Qur'an presents a comprehensive picture of the female reproductive cycle, starting from pregnancy, giving birth, to breastfeeding. All these phases are bound by the heavy and layered concept of sacrifice, so it is appropriate if the Qur'an places the obligation of *birr al-wālidayn* (devotion to parents) with special emphasis on mothers. This unique biological experience confirms that the position of a mother deserves greater respect. However, Shihab did not stop at biological and spiritual aspects alone. He emphasized that this verse has very important social implications. By describing the mother's sacrifice in detail, the Qur'an actually invites every child to be grateful and devoted to their mother. Not only that, this verse also serves as a reminder for husbands or fathers to shoulder responsibility in supporting the reproductive role of the wife. Thus, pregnancy is not a burden placed on women alone, but rather a family and community affair that must be managed together with love and responsibility (Sholekhah et al., 2024).

From an Islamic legal perspective, Shihab does not overemphasize the details of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) related to pregnancy, such as the laws of worship during pregnancy. He emphasizes the ethical dimension, namely how pregnancy should be viewed as a trust from God that requires patience, support, and respect. Husbands and their families have a moral obligation to assist, protect, and provide comfort to pregnant women. In this regard, Shihab rejects all forms of discrimination, neglect, or violence often experienced by pregnant women. His interpretation emphasizes that Islam came to uphold justice, compassion, and respect for the dignity of women. Shihab interprets this verse into a contemporary social context. He highlights that in many modern societies, pregnant women still frequently face structural injustice. They are often burdened with multiple responsibilities, required to maintain high-pressure work hours, or lack access to adequate healthcare. Therefore, the normative

message of the Quran needs to be translated into concrete policies that protect pregnant women. This includes the provision of humane maternity leave, adequate reproductive health services, and legal guarantees for the safety of mothers and children. In this way, the teachings of the Qur'an do not stop at the text level alone, but truly become an inspiration in building a just and caring social system (Rahman et al., 2025).

The closing verse, "Be grateful to Me and to your parents," according to Shihab, contains a profound spiritual message. This verse presents a close triangular relationship between God, parents, and children. Pregnancy is not only a biological event, but also part of a spiritual journey that connects humans with the Creator. By remembering the difficult struggles of a mother, humans are encouraged to always be grateful to God who has created the miraculous mechanism of reproduction, while also being devoted to parents who mediate the presence of life. Thus, gratitude to God and respect for mothers are two complementary and inseparable things (Diniyah et al., 2024). Through this interpretation, Quraish Shihab successfully presents a humanistic, rational, and contextual facet of the Quran. He does not view pregnancy solely as a legal regulation, but links it to biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. For him, the main message of the verses about pregnancy is respect for women as dignified individuals, as well as affirming the important role of the family and society in supporting reproductive health. This interpretation also demonstrates the Quran's timeless relevance, its ability to speak to the modern context, and its solutions to real-life issues faced by women. With this approach, Shihab presents an interpretation that not only enriches the body of Islamic scholarship but also guides the community in building a more just, healthy, and respectful life for human dignity (Ibrahim, 2024).

Third, childbirth. It is the culmination of the entire reproductive process, demanding physical strength, mental patience, and spiritual fortitude from women. The Qur'an views this phase with reverence, because behind the pain and struggle lies the birth of a new life as a gift from God. This process is not merely a biological experience, but also full of meaning of faith, sacrifice, and steadfastness. Thus, childbirth reflects a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, while also affirming Islam's respect for women's role in bringing life and maintaining the continuity of humanity. Quraish Shihab, in his Tafsir al-Misbah, pays close attention to the story of Maryam in the process of giving birth to Prophet Isa 'alahissalām, as described in QS. Maryam [19]: 22–25. These verses not only record the biological event of birth, but also contain rich spiritual, psychological, and social values. The wording of the verse is as follows:

فَحَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَذَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا فَاجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جُذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَلَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَّسِيًّا
فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَّا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا وَهُزِّي إِلَيْكِ بِجُذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسْقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا^ط

"So, she (Maryam) conceived him, then isolated herself with him to a distant place. The pain of giving birth forced her (to lean) against the base of a palm tree. She (Maryam) said, "Oh, if only I had died before this and become someone who was not noticed and forgotten (forever)." He (Jibril) called out to him from a low place, "Do not be sad. Indeed, your Lord has made a stream under you. Shake the base of the date palm towards you, it will surely drop ripe dates on you."

The Qur'an touchingly describes how Maryam faced her pregnancy until the birth process. In the narrative of QS. Maryam [19]: 22–25, it is seen that the increasingly difficult pregnancy prompted Maryam to isolate herself in a quiet place, specifically under a date palm tree. The choice of this isolated place reflects the physical and mental conditions she experienced: fatigue, pain, as well as the psychological burden due to the social stigma she had to bear. Quraish Shihab interprets that this description does not merely record a biological event, but also reveals a universal reality experienced by any woman when entering the birth phase, namely extraordinary physical suffering and deep emotional pressure (Fadlilah & Christiani, 2025).

Verse 23 depicts the peak of Maryam's suffering, leading her to express her wish that she had never been born. This emotional expression demonstrates the immense physical and psychological pressure she felt. Quraish Shihab emphasized that this statement should not be interpreted as a sign of weakness in Maryam's faith, but rather as a reflection of a very human emotional honesty when someone is in a difficult situation. In fact, Maryam's attitude provides a valuable lesson that women's reproductive experiences are not only biological but also require mental resilience, social support, and spiritual strengthening. From this perspective, the Quran acknowledges the suffering experienced by a mother while emphasizing the human dimension inherent in the process of childbirth. By depicting Maryam's inner struggle, this verse teaches the importance of empathy and appreciation for women's role in giving birth to a new generation. Its moral message is relevant not only for women but also for society at large, helping them better understand the need for comprehensive support in the reproductive process. Thus, the

Quran not only addresses normative obligations but also acknowledges the emotional and social realities that accompany women's experiences.

In verses 24–25, the Quran presents a comforting dimension. Allah sends an angel to comfort Maryam with practical instructions: to shake the base of a date palm tree to cause its fruit to fall, and to drink from a nearby stream of clear water. Quraish Shihab's interpretation highlights the important symbolism in these instructions. Even though Maryam was very weak, she was still asked to make an effort by shaking the tree. This teaches that divine help does not negate human effort, but rather that the two go hand in hand. In a medical context, dates and fresh water also have important value: dates are rich in nutrients that provide quick energy, while water helps restore stamina and soothes the mother in labor. Thus, this narrative presents a harmony between spiritual, biological, and medical aspects (Fajri, 2020). This story also demonstrates how the Quran integrates divine guidance with the realities of human life. Its message not only soothes Maryam spiritually but also provides practical solutions to her physical condition. Quraish Shihab emphasized that Maryam's small effort symbolizes active human involvement in facing trials, even though the final outcome remains dependent on God's will. Furthermore, the command to shake the date palm tree teaches optimism, that even the smallest human effort is meaningful and appreciated. Thus, this verse provides a universal lesson about the balance between prayer, effort, and trust in God.

Quraish Shihab then draws two important messages from Maryam's story. First, childbirth is a time of suffering, so women experiencing it require comprehensive support, both physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual. This verse also admonishes society not to add to women's burdens with stigma or discrimination, but rather to provide empathy and support. Second, the Quran emphasizes that in every difficult trial, humans must combine patience, prayer, and effort. God's help is real, but it still requires the participation and effort of His servants (Masykuroh et al., 2023). By presenting Maryam's story, the Quran presents an empathetic model for understanding women's reproductive experiences. This story is not simply a documentation of the birth of the Prophet Jesus, but a universal lesson about spirituality, struggle, and resilience in the face of pain. Quraish Shihab, through his commentary, emphasizes that childbirth is a sacred event worthy of respect and reminds us that God never abandons His servants alone in the midst of difficulties.

Fourth, Breastfeeding. One of the crucial phases in a woman's reproductive health cycle that receives special attention in the Quran. This activity is not only related to meeting the child's biological needs, but also involves emotional bonds, affection, and moral responsibility within the family. In the context of interpretation, Quraish Shihab provides a broad understanding of the role of breastfeeding, not only from a medical perspective but also from a social and spiritual perspective. In QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 233, Quraish Shihab highlighted the role of breastfeeding as an integral part of the family system. He asserted that the Qur'an uses the form of news to express a very strict order: "Mothers should breastfeed their children for two full years, for those who want to complete breastfeeding." This editorial shows that breastfeeding is a strong recommendation, almost approaching an obligation, with a maximum time limit of two years. The wording of the verse is as follows:

وَالْوَالِدَتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَيِّمَ الرِّضَاعَةَ ۖ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعُهَا ۚ لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَلَدِهِ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ ۚ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا ۚ وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْتَزِيعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

"Mothers should breastfeed their children for two full years, for those who want to complete breastfeeding. It is the father's duty to provide for their food and clothing in a proper way. A person is not burdened, except according to his ability. A mother should not be made to suffer for her child and neither should a father be made to suffer for his child. The heirs are also like that. If both of them want to wean (before two years) based on agreement and consultation between them, there is no sin on them. If you want to breastfeed your child (to someone else), there is no sin for you if you give payment in a proper way. Fear Allah and know that indeed Allah sees what you do."

Quraish Shihab in his interpretation gives an important emphasis on the use of the term in breastfeeding verses. According to him, the word al-wālidāt does not only refer to the biological mother, but also includes women who act as mothers in the context of breastfeeding, while the term ummahāt is more specifically used for biological mothers. This difference shows that the Qur'an recognizes breastfeeding as an important function that can be

performed by women other than the biological mother, although ideally it is done by the mother. Shihab affirmed that mother's milk is the best intake for babies, both in terms of nutrition and peace of mind, because babies have become accustomed to their mother's heartbeat since being in the womb. Therefore, breastfeeding for two years is seen as a time of completion that is highly recommended, although not absolute (Ramadhona et al., 2023). He added, if there are conditions that make breastfeeding must be stopped early such as the mother's health factors, economic limitations, or the baby's needs, it is allowed as long as it is done with a healthy consultation between father and mother. This shows that breastfeeding is not just a woman's biological affair, but the responsibility of the family as a whole. The father is obliged to provide adequate support so that the mother can breastfeed in a calm state without worrying about malnutrition. The principle of justice is emphasized: mothers cannot be forced to bear excessive burdens, while fathers cannot be demanded beyond their means. If the mother is unable to breastfeed, Islam opens up the space to find another milk mother (wet-nursing) with fair compensation. From here, Quraish Shihab presents a balance between ideal norms and contextual flexibility, with the main purpose of safeguarding the welfare of children while ensuring justice and harmony in the family (Maghfiroh, 2020).

2.3. Analysis and Relevance of Quraish Shihab's Interpretation to Women's Reproductive Health

Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the four main themes of female reproduction—menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding—demonstrates a distinctive methodological consistency that distinguishes him from other commentators. He combines linguistic analysis of the Qur'anic text, contextual reading according to social conditions, and a *maqā* approach. *shid al-syarī'ah* (the goals of Islamic law) to produce a balanced understanding between ideal norms and the realities of life. This approach is not only crucial for the development of the science of interpretation but also makes a significant contribution to the discourse on women's reproductive health in the modern era, where biological, social, and gender issues are increasingly complex.

First, the theme of menstruation demonstrates Quraish Shihab's progressive and humanistic views. In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 222, he asserts that menstruation is a natural biological condition, and therefore should not be used as a reason to discriminate against women. He highlights the word *al-mahīḍ* which refers not only to menstrual blood, but also to the entire biological and psychological phases women experience. In this way, he rejects the view that menstruation is absolutely impure and demeans women's dignity. Instead, the prohibition on sexual intercourse during menstruation is understood within the framework of family and health ethics, not social stigma. From a reproductive health perspective, this interpretation aligns with modern science, which views menstruation as a natural biological process requiring medical attention, hygiene, and emotional support. Thus, Shihab's interpretation helps reduce the social stigma that persists against menstruating women in many Muslim societies (Muhtadin, 2019).

Second, in the theme of pregnancy, Quraish Shihab emphasizes the dimension of hardship that must be respected and glorified. Referring to QS. Luqmān [31]: 14 and QS. Al-Aḥqāf [46]: 15, it interprets the term *wahnan 'alā wahnin* (weakness upon weakness) as a poetic and realistic depiction of a mother's struggle. According to Shihab, pregnancy is not merely a biological process, but a great trust that demands physical, emotional, and spiritual sacrifice. Therefore, respecting mothers is not only a child's obligation, but also the responsibility of husbands and society. From a reproductive health perspective, this message reminds us of the importance of comprehensive support: access to nutrition, adequate health services, emotional support from family, and social policies such as maternity leave and employment protection. Shihab's interpretation here directly intersects with modern reproductive health discourse that emphasizes social justice and the protection of pregnant women's rights (Das & Rahman, 2025).

Third, the experience of childbirth, as depicted through the story of Maryam in the Qur'an (Qur'an 19:22–25), presents both a dimension of suffering and spirituality. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that Maryam experienced such intense pain and despair that she wished she had never been born, an emotional expression that illustrates the reality of the hardships of childbirth. However, God provided comfort through the river water and falling dates, which, on the one hand, symbolize nutrition and physical strength, and on the other, are signs of divine compassion. According to Shihab, Maryam's command to shake the date palm tree, despite her weakness, contains an important message about the balance between human effort and God's help. This interpretation emphasizes that childbirth is not only a medical event, but also a meaningful spiritual experience. In the context of reproductive health, this demonstrates that women who give birth deserve moral, social, and medical support. Childbirth should not be a phase to be experienced in isolation, as Maryam experienced, but should be a moment full of support from family and society (Fadlilah & Christiani, 2025).

Fourth, breastfeeding as an extended phase of female reproduction is understood by Quraish Shihab as a child's right as well as a mother's right within the framework of family justice. In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:

233, he distinguishes between the terms al-wālidāt (mothers, both biological and non-biological) and ummahāt (biological mothers), to emphasize that breastfeeding is a function that can be performed by both biological and milk mothers. Shihab affirmed that mother's milk is the best nutrition as well as a source of peace for the baby, because the emotional bond with the mother starts from the womb. Two years of breastfeeding is referred to as a completion period, although flexibility is allowed if there is consultation between father and mother. This interpretation emphasizes that breastfeeding is not a one-sided responsibility of the mother, but a joint obligation in the family. The father has the role of providing sustenance so that the mother can breastfeed in peace, while the mother cannot be forced to bear a burden beyond her ability. If the mother is unable to afford it, finding another milk mother (wet-nursing) is allowed with fair compensation. This interpretation is in line with contemporary health policies that encourage support for fathers in the breastfeeding process, provision of maternity leave, and lactation room facilities at work (Ramadhona et al., 2023).

From these four themes, it is clear that Quraish Shihab presents a holistic paradigm of women's reproduction. He not only outlines the formal legal aspects, as widely described in classical fiqh texts, but also enriches his interpretation with biological, social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. His approach aligns with the women's reproductive health frameworks established by international organizations such as the WHO, the 1994 ICPD, and CEDAW, which emphasize that women have the right to optimal physical, mental, and social well-being throughout their reproductive cycle. Thus, Quraish Shihab's interpretation of verses on women's reproductive health demonstrates that the Quran addresses more than just normative legal issues, but also conveys a humanitarian message relevant to contemporary issues. He affirms the Quran's core values of child protection, respect for mothers, and the role of fathers in providing for their children, while simultaneously providing flexibility to adapt to social realities. Shihab's novel thinking lies in his ability to integrate Quranic interpretation with modern reproductive health discourse, thus creating a new perspective in the study of gender-based interpretation and health.

3. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the four main themes of female reproduction—menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding—demonstrates strong methodological consistency. He not only interprets the Quranic verses textually but also relates them to the biological, psychological, and social dimensions experienced by women. This contextual approach is combined with the principle of maqā (the principle of the meaning of the Quran). In his book on Islamic jurisprudence (*id al-syarī'ah*), Quraish Shihab presents an interpretation that aligns with the realities of life and addresses women's reproductive health issues in the modern era. In his discussion of menstruation, Quraish Shihab emphasizes that menstruation is a natural phenomenon that must be understood as part of a woman's reproductive health cycle. He rejects the notion that menstruation is the basis for discrimination or social stigma. Instead, the verses discussing menstruation are more directed at health and ethical aspects, particularly in maintaining harmonious family relationships. The theme of pregnancy is understood through the depiction of "weakness upon weakness" in the Qur'an, which demonstrates the hardships of a mother's struggle during pregnancy. According to Quraish Shihab, this condition demands full respect and support from her husband, children, and society. This interpretation emphasizes that pregnancy is a great trust that requires medical protection, psychological care, and adequate social security. Regarding childbirth, Quraish Shihab highlights the story of Maryam, who is depicted as experiencing profound suffering during labor. Maryam's experience illustrates that childbirth is a critical phase that is fraught with risk but also has a high spiritual dimension. Therefore, women who give birth need comprehensive support, both physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to be able to go through the birthing process better.

Meanwhile, on the topic of breastfeeding, Quraish Shihab explains that the Quran recommends breastfeeding for two full years as both a child's right and a mother's right. However, this provision is flexible, taking into account deliberation between the father and mother. The father is obliged to provide for the mother so that the mother can breastfeed peacefully, while the mother has the right to a supportive environment. This interpretation aligns with modern health discourse that emphasizes the importance of breastfeeding and the father's involvement in supporting the mother's reproductive role. Thus, Quraish Shihab's interpretation presents a relevant perspective on women's reproductive health issues. He emphasizes that the reproductive experience is not merely a biological matter, but a trust that must be carried out based on the values of compassion, justice, and shared responsibility. This research contributes by systematically mapping Quraish Shihab's views and connecting them to contemporary reproductive health discourse, thus making the interpretation part of the solution to modern challenges regarding women's rights and health.

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