

An Analysis of the Interpretation of the Phrase “*Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum*” in Relation to Self-Harm Behavior

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Abstract

Self-harm has become an important mental health concern because it involves deliberate acts of injuring oneself and may adversely affect an individual's physical and psychological well-being. From a Qur'anic perspective, the protection of the self can be examined through QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29, particularly the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*, which Qur'anic exegetes interpret as a prohibition against killing oneself and killing others. This study aims to analyze and compare interpretations of the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* and to explain its relevance to self-harm behavior through the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. This research employs a library research method using comparative (*muqārān*) and *maqāṣidi* approaches to Qur'anic interpretation. Primary data are drawn from the Qur'an and selected classical and contemporary tafsir works, while secondary data consist of scholarly literature on self-harm, mental health, and *maqāṣid al-syar'ah*. The findings show that the exegetes generally converge in understanding the phrase as a prohibition against acts that result in the loss of life, whether directed toward oneself or others, although they differ in their argumentative emphasis and interpretive scope. Textually, self-harm cannot be equated with suicide. However, from the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, self-harm has normative relevance to QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 because it involves acts that endanger the self. This study affirms that the Qur'anic principle of protecting life can provide an ethical and spiritual foundation for self-harm prevention without neglecting psychological approaches to its treatment.

Ḥifẓ Al-nafs; Maqāṣidi Tafsir; Self-Harm; Wa lā Taqtulū Anfusakum.

Abstrak

Fenomena *self-harm* menjadi persoalan kesehatan mental yang perlu mendapat perhatian karena berkaitan dengan tindakan menyakiti diri secara sengaja serta dapat berdampak pada kondisi fisik dan psikologis individu. Dalam kajian Al-Qur'an, persoalan perlindungan terhadap diri dapat dikaji melalui QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29, khususnya frasa *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*, yang oleh para mufasir dipahami berkaitan dengan larangan membunuh diri sendiri dan membunuh sesama manusia. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dan membandingkan penafsiran terhadap frasa *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* serta menjelaskan relevansinya terhadap perilaku *self-harm* melalui perspektif *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. Penelitian menggunakan metode kepustakaan dengan pendekatan tafsir *muqārān* dan tafsir *maqāṣidi*. Data primer bersumber dari Al-Qur'an dan kitab-kitab tafsir klasik maupun kontemporer, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur ilmiah mengenai *self-harm*, kesehatan mental, dan *maqāṣid al-syar'ah*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para mufasir memiliki titik temu dalam memahami frasa tersebut sebagai larangan terhadap tindakan yang menghilangkan jiwa, baik terhadap diri sendiri maupun orang lain, meskipun terdapat perbedaan dalam penekanan argumentasi dan cakupan penafsirannya. Secara tekstual, *self-harm* tidak dapat disamakan dengan bunuh diri. Namun, melalui perspektif *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, perilaku tersebut memiliki relevansi normatif dengan QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 karena mengandung unsur tindakan yang membahayakan diri. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa prinsip perlindungan jiwa dalam Al-Qur'an dapat memberikan landasan etis dan spiritual bagi pencegahan *self-harm* tanpa mengabaikan pendekatan psikologis dalam penanganannya.

Kata Kunci: *Ḥifẓ Al-Nafs; Self-Harm; Tafsir Maqāṣidi; Wa lā Taqtulū Anfusakum.*

INTRODUCTION

Self-harm in psychological studies refers to deliberate acts of injuring oneself. One form that has received considerable attention is *nonsuicidal self-injury* (NSSI), which refers to deliberate bodily injury without the intention of ending one's life. Although it differs from suicide, NSSI still requires serious attention because it may recur, cause physical injury, and be associated with psychological distress. Its manifestations include scratching or cutting the skin, hitting or banging the body, pinching oneself, and pulling one's hair in response to emotional distress (Xiao et al., 2022). Several factors have also been associated with NSSI among adolescents, including mental disorders, adverse childhood experiences, bullying, problematic behaviors, low health literacy, and gender-related factors (Wang et al., 2022).

Attention to self-harm has become increasingly important because recent studies indicate that this behavior is frequently found among adolescents. A global study examining sex differences in the prevalence of NSSI found substantial variation across regions and showed that such behavior cannot be explained solely by biological factors, as social and cultural contexts also play significant roles (Moloney et al., 2024). Recent clinical research has further emphasized that NSSI among adolescents is associated with emotion dysregulation, interpersonal distress, traumatic experiences, and the risk of suicidal behavior. Therefore, individuals engaging in NSSI should not simply be characterized as "weak," but should instead be understood as individuals experiencing complex psychological distress (Apicella et al., 2025). Impulsivity has also been associated with NSSI among adolescents, indicating that early interventions targeting self-control and emotion regulation are important components in preventing self-injurious behavior (He et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, academic attention to self-harm has also continued to develop. A bibliometric study of self-harm research in Indonesia during the 2015–2025 period showed that studies on self-injurious behavior among school and university students increased considerably after 2021. However, most of these studies remain descriptive and have not extensively developed culturally or religiously grounded interventions (Navion et al., 2025). Research among students has also shown that self-harm may be influenced by stress, loneliness, lack of social support, parenting patterns, and family problems (Aufa & Hasibuan, 2024). Other research has identified anxiety, low self-esteem, experiences of bullying, and peer relationship problems as factors associated with self-harm among Indonesian adolescents (Alini et al., 2025). In addition to psychological and social factors, spiritual aspects also deserve consideration in understanding self-harm. Studies on resilience and religiosity indicate that religious values may contribute to strengthening an individual's capacity to cope with emotional distress, including tendencies toward self-injury. Interventions for adolescent self-harm therefore should not rely solely on medical approaches, but should also address emotion regulation, social support, assistance, and the development of more positive meaning in life (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

In understanding self-harm, psychological approaches are important for explaining its triggering factors, behavioral functions, and consequences for individuals. However, religious perspectives may also contribute to an understanding of the importance of self-protection, help-seeking, meaning-making, inner calm, and psychological resilience in the face of distress (Litaqia & Permana, 2019). Studies concerning the Qur'an and mental health further suggest that spiritual values may support psychological well-being and assist individuals in coping more adaptively with life pressures (Nurusshobah & Fitra, 2025; Rofiqoh et al., 2025).

Within the Qur'anic context, one verse that has a direct connection with the issue of self-protection is QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29, particularly the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*. This verse is selected because the object of the prohibition is expressed through the word *anfusakum*, which may refer both to oneself and to fellow human beings. The phrase has been interpreted as a prohibition against killing fellow believers and also as encompassing the prohibition against killing oneself (Al-Tabari, 2001). In legal-oriented interpretation, the phrase is likewise understood as a prohibition against acts that result in the loss of life without justification under Islamic law (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). Therefore, QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 provides a more direct textual foundation for examining actions directed toward the self than an argument based solely on general principles of health or well-being.

Interpretations of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 reveal both common ground and differences in emphasis among Qur'anic exegetes. Classical interpretations pay particular attention to the scope of the prohibition against killing oneself and others, as well as to the legal consequences of acts that harm human life (Al-Qurtubi, 2006; Al-Tabari, 2001). The pronoun used in *anfusakum* has also been understood as having a broad scope, indicating that the prohibition is not limited to a single form of destruction of life (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984). In contemporary interpretations, the prohibition is situated within the broader framework of social order and the protection of human beings from injustice (Qutb, 2004), while human life is regarded as a trust that must be protected and must not be treated unjustly (Hamka, 2015). Despite differences in interpretive orientation and methodological emphasis, these interpretations converge on the principle that human life must be protected from destructive acts. This convergence provides the foundation for examining the normative relevance of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 to self-harm without equating self-harm with suicide.

Previous studies on self-harm have predominantly examined the psychological and social factors underlying the behavior. Stress, loneliness, limited social support, and parenting patterns have been found to be associated with self-harm among students (Aufa & Hasibuan, 2024). Anxiety, low self-esteem, experiences of bullying, and peer relationship problems have likewise been associated with self-harm among adolescents (Alini et al., 2025). The development of self-harm research among Indonesian adolescents and university students indicates that scholarly attention to this phenomenon has continued to increase, although most studies remain focused on psychological and social dimensions (Navion et al., 2025). Religiosity and resilience have also begun to receive attention in discussions of self-harm behavior (Safira & Prabawa, 2024). Meanwhile, studies of *maqāṣidī* tafsir have emphasized the importance of interpreting the Qur'an by considering the objectives and benefits intended by Islamic law (Lufaei & Fahriana, 2024). These bodies of literature have provided important foundations within their respective fields; however, they have not specifically integrated a comparative analysis of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29, the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, and psychological studies of self-harm within a single analytical framework.

Based on this research gap, the present study employs *muqāran* tafsir to compare the interpretations of Qur'anic exegetes concerning the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*, after which the comparative findings are examined through a *maqāṣidī* tafsir perspective, particularly the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. Psychological scholarship is employed to maintain clear conceptual distinctions

between self-harm, NSSI, and suicide, thereby preventing the relationship between the Qur'anic verse and the contemporary phenomenon from being constructed through an equation of these concepts. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the similarities and differences among interpretations of the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 and to explain its normative relevance to self-harm behavior. The novelty of this study lies in connecting the findings of comparative tafsir analysis with the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and contemporary psychological scholarship in order to explain the position of self-harm more proportionately within the framework of the protection of life.

METHOD

This study employs library research with a qualitative-descriptive approach. The primary data consist of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 and interpretations of the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* found in selected classical and contemporary tafsir works. The exegetes selected for comparison are Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Qurṭubī, Abu Hayyan al-Andalusī, Ibn 'Ashur, Sayyid Qutb, and M. Quraish Shihab. These exegetes were purposively selected because they represent different historical periods and interpretive orientations, including transmitted tradition, legal, linguistic, *maqāṣidī*, social, and contextual approaches. The interpretations of Wahbah al-Zuhailī and Hamka are used as supporting sources to strengthen the synthesis of the exegetical findings. The secondary data consist of books, journal articles, and previous studies addressing self-harm, *nonsuicidal self-injury* (NSSI), mental health, and *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. Data were collected through documentation by tracing, reading, identifying, and classifying relevant literature according to its relationship with the focus of the study.

The exegetical analysis employs the *muqāran* method to identify similarities, differences, and interpretive tendencies among the selected exegetes in their explanations of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 (Yahya et al., 2022). The comparison is based on four indicators: the linguistic meaning of the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*, the scope of the prohibited acts, the arguments used to construct each interpretation, and the orientation toward the protection of life reflected in each exegetical position. These differences are then analyzed by considering the methodological characteristics and interpretive tendencies of each exegete, so that the discussion does not merely present individual opinions but also produces a synthesis of the verse's interpretive scope. The comparative findings are subsequently examined through a *maqāṣidī* tafsir approach, with *ḥifẓ al-nafs* as the primary analytical focus. The *maqāṣid* framework used in this study refers to Ibn 'Ashur's thought on the preservation of life and human welfare, while the *maqāṣidī* approach is applied to connect the textual meaning of the verse with contemporary issues without separating it from its exegetical foundations (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984; Mustaqim, 2017).

The data analysis was conducted through several stages. *First*, the linguistic meaning and context of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 were identified, particularly the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum*. *Second*, the interpretations of the selected exegetes were inventoried and classified according to the predetermined comparative indicators. *Third*, their similarities, differences, arguments, and methodological tendencies were compared in order to formulate a synthesis of the verse's meaning. *Fourth*, the concepts of self-harm and NSSI were examined through psychological literature to establish a clear conceptual distinction between self-injury and suicide. *Fifth*, the results

of the exegetical analysis were connected with the principle of *hifz al-nafs* to assess the normative relevance of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 to self-harm behavior. The final stage involved formulating the implications of this interpretation for self-harm prevention while maintaining a distinction between tafsir as a normative-ethical foundation and psychological approaches as the basis for clinical and psychosocial intervention. The use of psychological perspectives in Qur'anic studies enables human behavior to be examined interdisciplinarily without diminishing the distinctive character of tafsir studies (Khotim et al., 2024). Likewise, the application of *maqāṣidī* tafsir to contemporary issues demonstrates that the objectives and benefits of Qur'anic verses can be used to interpret emerging phenomena while remaining grounded in the meaning and context of the Qur'an (Salamah et al., 2025). An interdisciplinary approach is therefore employed to ensure that tafsir and psychology are positioned according to their respective disciplinary function (Irawan & Putra, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of *Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29

QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 serves as the starting point of this discussion because it contains a prohibition directly addressed to *anfusakum*, or “yourselves.” The verse does not merely address the prohibition against unlawfully consuming the property of others, but also contains a principle concerning the protection of human life. Allah Almighty states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْكُمْ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

“O you who believe, do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly, except through trade conducted by mutual consent among you. And do not kill yourselves. Indeed, Allah is Most Merciful to you” (QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29) (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

Linguistically, the phrase *وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ* consists of the particle *لَا*, which functions as a prohibition; *تَقْتُلُوا*, derived from the root ق-ت-ل, denoting the act of killing or taking a life; and *أَنْفُسَكُمْ*, the plural form of *نَفْس*, attached to the second-person plural pronoun. The use of *أَنْفُسَكُمْ* allows for two dimensions of meaning: oneself and fellow members of the community. This linguistic structure gives rise to two interpretive tendencies, namely the prohibition against killing oneself and the prohibition against killing one another. These two meanings are not mutually exclusive; rather, they demonstrate the broad scope of protection contained in the verse (Al-Andalusi, n.d.; Al-Tabari, 2001).

In *جَامِعُ الْبَيَانِ*, the discussion of the verse is situated within a sequence of prohibitions against acquiring wealth unlawfully and engaging in acts that destroy life. The acquisition of wealth through usury, gambling, fraud, and other prohibited practices is contrasted with trade based on the mutual consent of the parties involved. Following the regulation of property, the verse continues with the prohibition *وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ*. This sequence indicates that the protection of property and the protection of life form part of a unified Qur'anic social ethic (Al-Tabari, 2001). Therefore, this explanation is more appropriately understood as part of the interpretive context of

the verse rather than being categorized as *أَسْبَابُ النَّزُولِ* in the absence of a specific narration explaining the occasion of revelation.

The collective meaning of *أَنْفُسَكُمْ* is further supported by a narration from Al-Dahhak on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas, who understood the phrase *وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ* as a prohibition against Muslims killing one another. The use of *أَنْفُسَكُمْ* in this sense reflects the close relationship among believers, such that an act against another person is regarded as an act against a member of the same community. This interpretation broadens the object of the prohibition from actions directed against oneself to the protection of the lives of others, without excluding the individual meaning also contained in the phrase (Al-Andalusi, n.d.). Thus, the linguistic structure of the verse supports two dimensions of protection simultaneously: the protection of oneself and the protection of others.

This protective dimension is further reinforced by the concluding phrase of the verse, *إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا*, which places the prohibitions contained in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 within the framework of Allah’s mercy toward human beings. The prohibition against unlawfully acquiring wealth and the prohibition against killing do not merely function as legal restrictions; they also direct human beings away from actions that damage individual and social life. In this context, Allah’s mercy is reflected in provisions that protect property, life, and the order of human relations (Al-Tabari, 2001). The concluding phrase therefore reinforces the understanding that the protection of life constitutes part of the ethical purpose embodied in the overall structure of the verse.

A comparison of the exegetes’ interpretations reveals a common commitment to the principle of protecting life, although differences remain in the emphasis of their arguments. The comparative findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative Interpretations of the Phrase *وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ*

Exegete	Interpretive Orientation/Emphasis	Meaning of <i>وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ</i>	Scope of the Prohibition	Interpretive Orientation
Al-Ṭabarī	Transmitted reports and linguistic analysis	Prohibition against killing fellow believers, also encompassing the prohibition against killing oneself	Oneself and others	Protection of individual and communal life
Al-Qurṭubī	Juridical/legal	Prohibition against killing one another and committing suicide	Oneself and others	Legal affirmation against acts that result in the loss of life
Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi	Linguistic	The apparent meaning includes the prohibition against killing oneself; <i>أَنْفُسَكُمْ</i> may also carry a collective meaning	Oneself and others	Breadth of meaning based on linguistic structure

Ibn 'Ashur	Linguistic and objectives of Islamic law	The prohibition is not limited to killing others but also includes destroying oneself	Oneself and others	Protection of life and prevention of self-destruction
Sayyid Qutb	Social	The prohibition against destroying life forms part of a social system aimed at preventing injustice	Individuals and society	Protection of social order and human life
M. Quraish Shihab	Contextual	The prohibition concerning life is related to the protection of the means that sustain life, including property	Self and social life	Balance between the protection of property and life

Source: Author's compilation based on Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurṭubī (2006), Al-Andalusī (n.d.), Ibn 'Ashur (1984), Qutb (2004), and Shihab (2002).

The table shows that the differences among the exegetes do not primarily concern whether the principle of protecting life is accepted, but rather how they explain the breadth of the phrase **أَنْفُسَكُمْ**. Interpretations characterized by transmitted reports and linguistic analysis emphasize the possibility of both individual and collective meanings (Al-Andalusī, n.d.; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Juridical interpretation places greater emphasis on the prohibitive status of the act and the normative consequences of actions that result in the loss of life (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). Contemporary exegetes, meanwhile, tend to situate the prohibition within a broader framework encompassing social order, protection from injustice, and the relationship between human life and the means that sustain it (Qutb, 2004; Shihab, 2002).

These differences in emphasis are related to the methodological orientations of the respective exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī largely develops his interpretation through transmitted reports and linguistic analysis, whereas Al-Qurṭubī gives greater attention to the legal implications of the verse. Abu Hayyan emphasizes linguistic aspects, particularly the possible scope of **أَنْفُسَكُمْ**. Ibn 'Ashur gives greater consideration to the generality of the meaning and the objective of protecting life, while Qutb and Shihab interpret the verse within the broader relationship between social order and the preservation of human life (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984; Qutb, 2004; Shihab, 2002). Thus, the **التَّفْسِيرُ الْمَقَارَنُ** method demonstrates that a single phrase may generate different interpretive emphases while retaining a common foundation in the principle of protecting life.

Ibn 'Ashur's interpretation provides an important basis for understanding the breadth of this prohibition. The pronoun used in **أَنْفُسَكُمْ** is understood as not restricting the prohibition solely to killing others, but also encompassing actions that lead to one's own destruction. This interpretation is reinforced by the narration concerning 'Amr ibn al-'As, who performed *tayammum* while in a state of major ritual impurity on an extremely cold night because he feared that using water would endanger his life. When the incident was reported to the Prophet Muhammad, his action was not condemned. This narration is used to demonstrate that protecting oneself from

circumstances that may cause harm is consistent with the scope of the principle expressed in *Wā Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984).

The comparative findings reveal two levels of meaning in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29. At the textual level, the verse prohibits killing oneself and unlawfully killing others. At the level of its broader objective, the various interpretations converge on the importance of protecting human life from acts that lead to harm or destruction. The connection between the prohibition against unlawfully acquiring property and the prohibition against killing also demonstrates that the Qur'an places the protection of property and life within an integrated framework of human welfare.

These findings also establish a boundary for applying the verse to the phenomenon of self-harm. Textually, the phrase *وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ* cannot simply be translated as "do not engage in self-harm," because self-injury without suicidal intent differs from suicide. Their relevance lies at the level of principle rather than in equating the two forms of behavior. Their point of convergence concerns actions directed toward the self that may endanger physical and psychological well-being. Therefore, the relationship between QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 and self-harm must subsequently be examined through the perspective of *حِفْظُ النَّفْسِ*, so that the contextual extension of the verse remains grounded in the interpretations of the exegetes without altering its textual meaning.

Self-Harm from Psychological and Life-Protection Perspectives

Linguistically, *self-harm* consists of two words: *self*, referring to oneself, and *harm*, meaning to hurt or injure. In psychological studies, self-harm is understood as the deliberate act of injuring oneself. This behavior may take various forms that cause pain or bodily injury without necessarily involving a direct intention to end one's life. Self-harm is therefore a psychological term describing behaviors in which individuals intentionally hurt or injure themselves in various ways, whether or not suicidal intent is present (Kusumadewi et al., 2020).

These definitions indicate that self-harm cannot be understood solely as a physical act, but should also be viewed as a manifestation of deeper psychological difficulties. Self-harm is closely associated with emotional distress, a psychological condition that occurs when individuals perceive the demands, pressures, or changes they face as exceeding their capacity to cope. Such behavior may serve to alleviate negative emotions or provide temporary relief. Self-harm is also closely related to emotion dysregulation, namely the inability to manage emotions adaptively. Individuals with limited emotional regulation may therefore be more vulnerable to self-injurious behavior when confronted with psychological pressure, interpersonal conflict, loneliness, or traumatic experiences.

Self-harm is influenced not only by internal factors but also by external conditions such as social and environmental pressures. A study entitled *Implementasi Pendekatan REBT untuk Mereduksi Perilaku Self-harm*, conducted among ninth-grade students at SMP Telkom Sekar Kemuning Cirebon, found that family-related factors were among the contributors to self-harm behavior. Disharmonious or disrupted family conditions may contribute to negative patterns of thinking, such as the belief that one is undeserving of affection. Individuals from broken-home families may feel different from their peers because they perceive themselves as receiving insufficient parental attention and affection. The self-harm behaviors identified in the study included biting and scratching the skin until bleeding or scarring occurred, intentionally causing bodily pain, inserting

or pressing needles against the skin, hitting oneself, banging one's head, and deliberately pulling one's hair (Jannah et al., 2024).

Other findings indicate that family circumstances are not the only factors associated with self-harm. Research involving eighth-grade students at MTs Muallimin Univa Medan identified several additional contributing factors, including stress, difficulties in managing emotions, loneliness, limited social support, and parenting patterns (Aufa & Hasibuan, 2024).

Research involving students from the Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Andalas from the 2021 and 2022 cohorts similarly identified several factors associated with self-harm among university students. These included a history of bullying, sexual violence, previous mental health problems, and female gender. These findings were linked to differences in emotion-regulation abilities between males and females, with females described as being more vulnerable to negative emotional experiences. Such vulnerability may encourage some individuals to use self-harm as a means of relieving emotional distress and obtaining temporary relief (Luthfi et al., 2025).

A review of previous studies therefore indicates that self-harm is a complex phenomenon influenced by interconnected internal and external factors, including individual psychological conditions and surrounding social dynamics. Self-harm is also associated with an increased risk of suicidal behavior. Self-injurious behavior represents a serious concern because, in certain contexts, it may contribute to suicide-related mortality. Self-harm was reported to have contributed to approximately 600,000 deaths in developing countries in 1990 (Ee & Mey, 2011). In Indonesia, 38% of 314 students at one university were reported to have engaged in self-harm, while 21% had also attempted suicide (Tresno et al., 2012). Furthermore, research entitled *Nonsuicidal Self-Injury and Suicidal Behaviors in Girls: The Case for Targeted Prevention in Preadolescence* reported that 75% of hospitalized patients who engaged in NSSI (*nonsuicidal self-injury*) or self-harm subsequently attempted suicide, while approximately 10% eventually died by suicide (Beauchaine et al., 2019). Thus, although self-harm is not necessarily equivalent to suicide, it remains a serious behavior because it may indicate severe psychological distress and increase vulnerability to more fatal outcomes.

From an Islamic perspective, this condition can be examined through the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. The protection of life does not merely refer to preventing the loss of life, but also encompasses the preservation of physical safety, psychological stability, and human well-being. Studies on *ḥifẓ al-nafs* explain that the protection of life constitutes an important objective of Islamic law, aimed at safeguarding both the continuity and quality of human life (Maharani et al., 2025). Accordingly, self-harm may be understood as behavior that is inconsistent with the principle of protecting life because it involves harm directed toward oneself, even when it is not intended as an act of suicide.

Implications of the Meaning of *Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* for Self-Harm Behavior

Based on the interpretations of Qur'anic exegetes, the phrase *Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 is, at the literal level, more directly associated with the prohibition against killing oneself and killing others. However, when examined through the framework of *maqāṣid al-ṣyari'ah*, the meaning of the verse may be extended to include the prohibition against actions that endanger the body and the psyche. This extension does not alter the basic meaning of the verse;

rather, it seeks to uncover the fundamental value embedded within it, namely the protection of life (Ismail et al., 2025). Accordingly, the question of whether the prohibition against “killing oneself” may also relate to “injuring oneself” can be addressed proportionately. Textually, killing oneself and injuring oneself are two distinct acts. Nevertheless, within the framework of *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah*, particularly the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life), safeguarding life is not limited to preventing death but also includes protecting physical health, psychological well-being, and human welfare more broadly. Therefore, behaviors that potentially cause harm to oneself, either physically or psychologically, may be regarded as inconsistent with the objectives of Islamic law. From a *maqāṣidi* perspective, self-harm and suicide intersect at the level of self-destructive consequences, both of which are inconsistent with the principle of protecting life or *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Dahlan et al., 2021).

Self-harm and suicide are two distinct forms of behavior, particularly in terms of intention. Self-harm, especially NSSI, involves the deliberate injury of one’s body without the primary intention of ending one’s life, whereas suicidal behavior involves an intention to cause death. Nevertheless, NSSI still requires serious attention because it may be associated with severe psychological distress and may increase vulnerability to suicidal behavior among some individuals (Beauchaine et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). This distinction demonstrates that self-harm should not be legally or conceptually equated with suicide.

Within the framework of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, the point of convergence between the two lies in the principle of protecting human safety, rather than in equating their forms or levels of severity. Suicide directly leads toward the loss of life, whereas self-harm causes bodily injury and may aggravate psychological distress without necessarily involving a desire to die. Therefore, the relevance of self-harm to the value of *Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* is situated at the normative-ethical level, namely the obligation to protect oneself from harmful actions, rather than as a claim that the verse textually equates self-harm with suicide. This interpretation allows the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* to serve as an ethical foundation for self-harm prevention while continuing to recognize individuals who engage in self-harm as persons in need of psychological, social, and spiritual support (Tarigan & Apsari, 2022).

The practical implication of this interpretation is the need to integrate psychological and spiritual approaches. Psychological approaches are necessary to help individuals identify sources of distress, manage emotions, develop self-regulation skills, and obtain social support. Spiritual approaches, meanwhile, may provide sources of meaning, hope, inner calm, and an awareness that human life must be protected as a trust from Allah. Studies on religiosity indicate that spiritual values may function as protective factors against self-injurious tendencies by helping individuals build resilience when facing psychological distress (Safira & Prabawa, 2024). Accordingly, the contribution of Qur’anic interpretation to self-harm prevention lies in strengthening ethical and spiritual awareness regarding the protection of the body and the self. In the context of mental health, Qur’anic values may also function as ethical and spiritual resources that support meaning-making, inner tranquility, and psychological resilience (Nurusshobah & Fitra, 2025; Rofiqoh et al., 2025). Thus, the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* in this study is not intended to replace psychological treatment for self-harm, but rather to provide a normative foundation that strengthens awareness of self-protection and encourages help-seeking when individuals experience psychological distress.

Based on the discussion above, QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 has strong relevance for understanding the phenomenon of self-harm in contemporary society. The phrase *Wa Lā Taqtulū Anfusakum* is not only understood as a prohibition against ending one's life, but may also provide a normative basis for rejecting actions that endanger oneself. This interpretation demonstrates that the Qur'an can contribute to strengthening awareness of the protection of life, supporting the prevention of self-injurious behavior, and promoting a more integrated response to mental health concerns. Accordingly, self-harm may be understood as behavior that is inconsistent with the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, while its treatment should involve a synergy of religious values, social support, and psychological approaches.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 is understood by Qur'anic exegetes as a prohibition against killing oneself and unlawfully killing others. Textually, the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* cannot be directly interpreted as a prohibition against self-harm. However, through a *maqāṣidī* tafsir approach, the verse has normative relevance to self-harm because the objective of Islamic law embodied in the verse is oriented toward the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). It may therefore serve as a normative foundation for rejecting actions that endanger or damage the body and the self. Accordingly, self-harm is not positioned as a form of suicide, but as behavior that is inconsistent with the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* because it involves an element of harm directed toward oneself.

From the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, the protection of life is not limited to preventing the loss of life, but also encompasses the preservation of physical health, psychological well-being, and human welfare more broadly. Self-harm should therefore be regarded as a serious concern because it may aggravate psychological distress and increase vulnerability to more fatal outcomes, including suicide. In this context, Qur'anic interpretation contributes a normative, ethical, and spiritual foundation that encourages awareness of the responsibility to protect the body and the self as a trust from Allah, while also promoting a more humane perspective toward individuals experiencing psychological distress.

The novelty of this study lies in interpreting the phrase *wa lā taqtulū anfusakum* through the integration of comparative tafsir, *maqāṣidī* tafsir, and contemporary mental health studies. This study does not extend the textual meaning of the verse beyond the interpretations of the exegetes; rather, it demonstrates that the objectives of Islamic law contained in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 29 have normative relevance to self-harm as a form of self-destructive behavior within the framework of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*. Thus, this study affirms the continuing relevance of Qur'anic values as a conceptual foundation for developing self-harm prevention efforts through the integration of religious, psychological, and social approaches.

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DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors used ChatGPT as an assistive tool for language editing, sentence-structure improvement, organization of presentation, and consistency in academic writing. The main ideas, Qur'anic exegetical analysis, interpretation of library-based data, arguments, and conclusions were independently developed and determined by the authors based on the scholarly sources used in this study. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, verified, and further edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and content of this article.

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