

# Gender Inequality in The Novel “Death of an Ex-Minister” by Nawal El Saadawi

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**Abstract.** This study aims to describe the gender inequality contained in the novel Death of an Ex-Minister by Nawal el Saadawi using gender theory by [Mansour Fakh \(2005\)](#) which includes marginalization, subordination, stereotype, violence, and workload. The method used was descriptive qualitative. The results showed that there was gender inequality that was manifested in four forms: marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and violence. Marginalization occurs in the form of dismissals by male superiors to female employees who were considered to often express opinions that differ from them. Subordination was indicated by the position of women who were lower than men. Whereas, stereotyping occurred with the negative attachment of a husband to his wife that because he was the one who gave food he had the right to do anything to his wife. The violence occurred in the form of physical violence by a husband against his wife and sexual violence experienced by a woman who was raped by ten men.

**Keywords:** Gender, Gender Inequality, the novel Death of an Ex-Minister

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## INTRODUCTION

Literary work is one of the media that has an impact on changes in social phenomena. Many changes in social life from literary works such as novels. Novels are a form of literary work that is already familiar to connoisseurs of literature. The novel is a work of prose fiction that is written narratively and is usually written in the form of stories. Novel in the broadest sense is an imaginative work that is built through its intrinsic elements such as events, plots, figures, backgrounds, perspectives, diverse settings and so on which are imaginative (Nurgiyantoro,2009). The contents of the novel are longer and more complex than the contents of short stories, and there are no structural and poetic restrictions. In general, a novel tells about the characters in daily life along with all the characteristics.

A novel usually tells about human life in interacting with the environment and also with other humans. In a novel, the author usually tries his best to direct the reader to various kinds of images of the reality of life through the stories contained in the novel. Thus, the novel has an important role when it can provide perspectives on how to respond to life that is presented imaginatively. This is because what is presented in a novel is a matter of human life. One of the studies that are often examined from novel literary works is about women. Many novels examine real life for the context of women's lives from violence to injustice. This has become a very interesting phenomenon.

Many Indonesian writers write novels about women. Various kinds of themes are presented in a novel along with so many problems of life in this world that can be raised as the theme of a novel. The theme of women is one of the many themes raised in a novel. With all its dynamics and romance, women are a source of inspiration that can continue to be expressed in a novel. The three novels of Korrie Layun Rampan are feminism type works because the female characters in the three novels are Dayak women who have been imaged as traditional and modern women. However, their figure still clashes with the Dayak cultural traditions that embrace patriarchalism (Herawati, 2013; Kaprisma et al., 2018; Permatasari, 2017). The views on women can also be understood from differences, education, household status, employment, and socio-cultural background (Prasetyawan Purnomosidhi & Lustyantie, 2018). Women have a very big struggle in various aspects to show their role (Quyoom, 2017; Yahya, 2016; Leiliyanti, 2009). Feminism in Indonesian society is related to the term emancipation that women today still raise this issue. However, *Arisan 2!* The film shows a shift in film discourse about the representation of cosmopolitan women in Indonesia. Feminism in *Arisan 2!* This film is likely to reveal liberal feminism in modern society today through several issues of women's emancipation, especially in the fields of marriage, work, and social life (Haryanti & Suwana, 2014). Thus, the exploitation of gender as a socio-cultural construct gives rise to injustice. Ironically, this injustice causes neglect due to the strict customary hegemony and order in society (Santosa, 2013). So many of the main female figures in the Indonesian and Malaysian novels presented struggling for themselves. Strong and tough women who live in a patriarchal discriminatory society where women are seen as second-class society and objects of sexual desire (Turaeni, 2010).

From previous research studies on women, it also implies the novel Nawal el Saadawi is an author who is sensitive to the problems faced by individuals and society. Nawal el Saadawi's literary works mostly feature female protagonists who challenge male oppression and domination. El-Saadawi's unwavering commitment to the struggle of women demands our admiration especially when loyalty and obligations disappear (Albantani & Madkur, 2017). Novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" is one of her works which contains elements of gender inequality experienced by women. "Death of an Ex-Minister" is Nawal el Saadawi's novel that contains a collection of short stories that presented a variety of stories about the complexity of life in every human being, both men and women, in various matters such as politics, sex, love, the meaning of life and so forth.

The novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" is one of his works that contain elements of gender inequality experienced by women. "Death of an Ex-Minister" is a novel Nawal el Saadawi which contains a collection of short stories that present various stories about the complexities of the lives of every human being, both men and women, in various matters such as politics, sex, love, the meaning of life and so on. Nevertheless, the theme of gender inequality has been widely discussed by several previous researchers in various novels both from Indonesia and abroad. Previous studies have concluded that women are often studied concerning injustice in various fields and dimensions.

However, in the novel Death of an Ex-Minister which is a collection of short stories has not been much studied related to gender inequality. Therefore, research on gender inequality for the current era is still very relevant to real-life as revealed by el Saadawi. The concept of injustice in women that still often occurs is very important to understand at this time so that the balance of life in any field between men and women can be harmonized. Although the whole story of the Death of an Ex-Minister has various kinds of studies not only about gender. Based on this, the problem discussed in this study is how the understanding of gender injustice that often occurs in women until now should not have happened. Thus, this study can be used as a reference as the existence of everyone in dealing with or resolving gender injustice issues.

This research is important to do for the following reasons. First, the development of human life that demands equality between women and men. Second, a collection of stories in the novel Death of an Ex-Minister teaches a variety of life balance that must be done in real life. Third, the writer has a comprehensive view of the existence of women in the world of life. Thus, the purposes of the study are to get deep about gender inequality contained in the novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" by Nawal El Saadawi using gender theory by Mansour Fakih (2005) which includes marginalization, subordination, stereotype, violence, and workload.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Gender Concept

Understanding gender is different from understanding sex. Sex is the division of human's sex that is biologically determined and is attached to a specific sex. The concept of sex is used to distinguish men and women based on biological

and anatomical elements of the body. The tools owned by men and women based on biological and anatomical elements of the body are attributes that are forever attached to every human being and their functions are not interchangeable. These tools are permanent unchanged and are biological provisions or God's provisions (nature). Therefore, sex is an innate trait with birth as a human.

While gender is a term used to describe social differences between men and women. Gender is a concept that shows a system of roles and relationships between women and men that is not determined by biological differences but by the social, political, and economic environment (Emzir & Rohman, 2015). In other words, gender is the result of social and cultural construction such as women being considered gentle, emotional, maternal, and so forth. While men are considered strong, rational, mighty, and so on. Furthermore, Ansori et. al (1997) in (Emzir & Rohman, 2015) develop concepts in understanding gender as follows.

- a. *Gender Differences* is the set of differences from social attributes, characteristics, behaviour, appearance, manner of dresses, expectations, roles and others that are formulated for individuals according to birth conditions (sex). Misinterpretations that often occur mainly in the scope of scientific studies, the attribute of gender differences is seen more like a category that is natural and therefore biological explanations are more suitable and necessary to do.
- b. *Gender gap* which shows the differences in political rights (voting) and attitude between men and women.
- c. *Genderization* is a concept reference towards the efforts to place the type at the centre of attention to self-identity and views (from and towards others), for example, the term she and he in English to distinguish him as a woman and her as a man.
- d. *Gender identity* is the image of behaviour that should be owned and displayed by someone according to his/her sex. As a result, if differences in behaviour occur according to sex, it is considered behavioural deviations.
- e. *Gender role* is the role of women or men which is applied in a tangible form according to the local culture adopted and accepted. Thus, the appropriate gender roles for each gender will be different for each community.

There are still many women who experience gender inequality which is their right to have an equal position with men. This is evident that men, especially those who are still in a patriarchal environment, play a more central role in all matters, especially in choosing the way of life they want. This means that there is still gender inequality between men and women. Factors that cause gender inequality are, among others, (1) the existence of men's organizations that do not allow women to develop optimally, (2) men as the main breadwinner in the family, (3) culture that always takes up men have taken root in society, (4) discriminatory legal norms and political policies, (5) women are very prone to rape or sexual harassment and if this happens it will damage the image of family and society (Fakih, 2005). The following is a broader explanation of gender inequality.

## Gender Inequality

Gender differences cause various inequalities, both for men and especially against women (Fakih, 1997). The society as a group that creates gender division behaviour to determine based on what they consider to be a necessity, to distinguish between men and women. The problem of gender inequality does not need to occur if there is a common relationship between men and women in a social context, such as the existence of mutual respect, humanizing and upholding mutual understanding. But as is often seen so far women are more often experiencing gender inequality by placing women below the level of men in social relations. This condition aroused the awareness of some women to fight for gender equality. The feminism movement cannot be separated from the realization of gender equality. The basic commitment of feminists is achieving gender equality and rejecting inequality against women. Concerning gender inequality Fakih (Fakih, 2005) argues that the manifestation of gender inequality includes (1) gender and the marginalization of women; (2) gender and subordination; (3) gender and stereotypes; (4) gender and violence; (5) gender and workload (Emzir & Rohman, 2015). The following is an explanation of the manifestations of gender inequality.

### Gender and Women Marginalization

Marginalization is a process of the impoverishment caused by gender differences. Gender assumptions can be used to marginalize a person or group. Women are the aggrieved party than men in this gender inequality.

The marginalization of women occurs since being in the household, for example, women are considered to have a feminine outlook so that women are only suitable if working as caregivers, kindergarten teachers, nurses and others who are feminism. Another example is that many women labourers become poor due to the belief of company leaders that only men are suitable to be managers, so promotion and education/training are only given to men. Thus, female workers become hampered by their careers because of this belief is used to marginalize a person or group.

### Gender and Subordination

Subordination is the assessment or assumption that a role performed by one sex is lower than another. Gender views give rise to subordination to women who have been in the past where women are lower than men. For example, because they are considered less able and inferior to men, women are often given light and easy tasks. Then there is the assumption that women are irrational, emotional, and are therefore considered unable to lead and must, therefore, be placed in positions that are not important. It is known, the values that apply in society, have separated and sorted out the roles of gender, men and women. There are still community values that limit the scope of movement, especially women in life.

### Gender and Stereotype

*The stereotype* is an image, description, to a person or group that comes from a wrong perception. One of the stereotypes that develops based on the notion

of gender, which occurs to one sex, (women), negative labelling of women causes inequality that is detrimental to women. For example, women are considered whiny, emotional, irrational, and so forth. When a man is angry, he is considered assertive, but if a woman is angry or offended it is considered emotional and cannot hold back. Even, there is the assumption that because women like to dress up to attract the attention of men, if there is a case of sexual violence or sexual harassment is always associated with this stereotype. Another example is the view that the task and function of women are only to carry out work related to household. This labelling does not only occur within the scope of the household but also in society and government.

### **Gender and Violence**

Gender-based violence is violence that is done because the community's understanding of certain sexes is considered to be stronger or weaker. Women are considered as weak creatures so they can be treated arbitrarily while men are the opposite. The distinction eventually results in acts of violence. Violence against women in various forms occurs as a result of differences in treatment-related to gender. Violence is not only about physical things such as torture, rape but also non-physical nature such as sexual harassment, harsh words, insults and so on. [Fakih \(1997\)](#) divides forms of violence into eight parts, they are:

1. forms of rape violence against women, including marital rape. Rape occurs when a person is forced to obtain sexual services without the relevant volunteer. This irrelevance often cannot be expressed due to various factors, such as fear, shame, economic and social or cultural compulsion, there is no other choice.
2. physical beatings and attacks that occur in the household, including the torture of children.
3. forms of torture that lead to genital organs.
4. violence in the form of prostitution.
5. violence in the form of pornography. This type of violence includes non-physical violence, which is harassment in which a woman's body is made an object for one's benefit.
6. violence in the form of forced sterilization in family planning.
7. covert violence, such as holding or touching certain parts of a woman's body in various ways and opportunities without the willingness of the owner of the body.
8. the most common crime committed against women committed in the community is known as sexual harassment.

### **Gender and Workload**

Another form of discrimination and gender inequality is the excessive workload that must be done exaggeratedly by one particular sex. Many women who work outside the home also still have to do homework when at home. This situation is a form of gender inequality where women's workload is doubled.

In the process of development, the reality is that women as human resources are still treated differently, especially if they are involved in the public sector. There



are many inequalities felt, although there are also inequalities experienced by men on one side.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research implemented a pragmatic approach in the form of gender inequality which includes marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, violence, and workload. The object of this research was the novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" by Nawal El Saadawi where in this novel there are gender inequalities experienced by women. The research data collected were in the form of words, sentences and discourse from the novel "Death of an Ex-Minister".

This study uses primary and secondary data sources. The primary data from this study was the novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" by Nawal El Saadawi. The novel consists of 120 pages and was published by the Obor Indonesia Foundation in 1994 in Jakarta. While secondary data was in the form of other literature books containing theories that are relevant to this research.

The data collection techniques and procedures carried out in this study are the analysis of the novel document of "Death of an Ex-Minister" and literature study. A literature study is a data collection technique by conducting a study of books, literature, notes, and reports which have to do with research objectives. Data analysis procedures carried out in this research were intensive novel-reading; identify and process data by classifying data related to the research object; marking words, sentences and discourses in novels containing gender inequality; and describe the results of the analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" by Nawal El Saadawi contains a collection of seven short stories that highlight various aspects of human life such as politics, sex, love, and so on. This research only focuses on examining aspects of gender inequality experienced by women found in the short stories in this novel. The seven short stories are (1) *Death of His Excellency, the Ex-Minister* (Cairo, 1974); (2) *The Veil* (Addis Ababa, 1978); (3) *The Greatest Crime* (Kafr Tahla, Egypt 1970); (4) *A Man's Confession* (Cairo, 1969); (5) *A Modern Love Letter* (Alexandria, 1969); (6) *On-Camera* (Beirut, 1976); and (7) *A Personal Letter to an Artist Friend* (Cairo, 1977). Following is the analysis of gender inequality in the novel "Death of an Ex-Minister" by Nawal El Saadawi.

### Gender Inequality in the Form of Marginalization of Women

Many inequalities occur in social practices, such as women as victims of sexual violations or rape, physical abuse by husband, polygamy, physical and psychological abuse by household members. Gender inequality is built into one's mind in social life that lasts a long time, so he does not consider it wrong. Gender inequality is a system and structure in which men and women are victims of the system. In this novel, it is found the treatment of women by marginalizing women in aspects of their lives. Women are considered unable to do anything without men. There is also an assumption that marginalization of women refers to the concept of the role of women in certain fields such as women-only having a role in domestic

affairs and not being able to do public aspects. This study reveals about gender inequality through sentences in the novel that contains gender inequality.

(A.1). ...my body temperature only came down after I issued decisions that I could issue with my authority as a minister to destroy her and crush her.

(*Death of His Excellency, the Ex-Minister*; p. 13)

The situation above illustrates how gender inequality is in the form of marginalization. With his authority as a minister of the character 'I' above made a decree to destroy his female employees by firing her. The woman is considered too brave of him as a boss. His decision made the woman lose her job. As reviewed by [Baliamoune-Lutz & McGillivray \(2015\)](#) dan [Cooray & Potrafke \(2011\)](#) shows that political institutions do not significantly influence the education of girls: the autocratic regime does not discriminate against girls in denying educational opportunities and democracy does not discriminate based on gender when providing educational opportunities. The main influence on gender inequality in education is through culture and religion. In study A is related to the presence of women in education. However, this aspect of similarity arises in the fear of the existence of women being human figures who are intelligent and able to do everything like men. The impression that appears can be seen from the concern over the role of women in the public which can be more dominant, even the existence of women can defeat the role of men.

### **Gender Inequality in the Form of Subordination**

The construction of masculinity and femininity takes men and women, on the biological bodies of men or women who are immersed in the changing social environment, and which are changed by these people, therefore the social relations between them, including personal relationships, will be appropriate in a way that legally and historically endorsed. This social construction of the roles of men and women, researchers acknowledge the record of subordinate women and domestic violence.

(B.1) Suddenly I shouted in front of his face with a loud voice, "How dare you? Who do you think you are? Don't you know that whoever you are, you are only a lowly servant and I am a minister and that how high you can reach the position, in the end you are still a woman whose place is a bed and suppressed by a male?" (*Death of His Excellency, the Ex-Minister*; p. 10)

(B.2) I once heard my father arguing with my mother because my mother had just woken up and opened the door after a long time my father rang the bell. My father also accused my mother of not hearing well. (*The Greatest Crime*; p. 41)

(B.3) For this is marriage. How else can a man vent his anger if there is no marriage? A man who is the poorest and who comes from the lowest class of society eventually returns to his house, to his wife, so that he can shed his anger and feel that he is a man. (*A Man's Confession*, p. 57)

(B.4) He had said to his daughter bitterly: Politics, my girl, not for women and girls. (*On Camera*, p. 98)



The data above illustrates gender inequality in the form of subordination, which is the attitude or action of placing women in a lower position. Data (B.1) shows how a woman is considered to be lower than a man even though she has a position. It implies the woman seemed not allowed to 'fight' men who are considered higher than her.

While the data (B.2) shows that the treatment of his father who argued with her mother was only because her mother slept and did not hear the bell. This treatment shows that women are considered inferior to men, especially the father scoffs at her mother by saying something is wrong with his ear.

Gender inequality in other forms of subordination occurs in the described in the data (B.3). How the character's view of marriage is very degrading to women by saying that the function of marriage is as a place for men to vent their anger towards women (wife) no matter whether the anger is caused by his wife or not.

In data (B.4), the statement made by the father to his daughter is a form of gender inequality in the form of subordination. The statement shows that women will not be able to survive when entering politics because men are the ones who are more suitable to enter politics. These assumption positions women are lower than men in politics.

The term 'women's subordination' refers to the lower position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making, etc. And patriarchal domination experienced by women in most societies. Thus, female subordination means the inferior position of women towards men. Feelings of helplessness, discrimination and limited self-esteem experiences and self-confidence together contribute to women's subordination. Thus, women's subordination is a situation, where there are a power relationship and men dominate women. Women's subordination is the main feature of all structures of interpersonal domination, but feminists choose different locations and causes of subordination. Subordination is a situation where someone is forced to remain under someone else's control. So, women's subordination means a social situation in which women are forced to remain under the control of men. In this way to keep women under male control, the patriarchy carries out some social habits, traditions and social roles through the process of socialization (Sultana, 2011). Inequality might result in gaps between men and women and discrimination against women. Gender inequality experienced by Javanese women is illustrated in the novel *Alun Samudra Rasa* by Ardini Pangastuti Bn. There are several forms of gender inequality with the main characteristics of women, namely subordination, stereotyping, violence, and workload (Hidayah, Subiyantoro, Wardhani, & Saddhono, 2019)

### **Gender Inequality in the Form of Stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes are often internalized by men and women. Gender stereotypes are pre-formed views or ideas, according to which individuals are categorized into certain gender groups, usually defined as "women" and "men" and arbitrarily determined characteristics and roles that are determined and limited by their gender.

- (C.1) My wife is the only person I can scold with great and free. The reason is well known. She can't turn angry at me in the same way. ... And against my wife I can shed my anger violently and freely. (*A Man's Confession*, p. 56)
- (C.2) I am the one who bears their lives (his wife and children) and feed them and if they are angry with me then they cannot find my successor. (*A Man's Confession*, p. 57)

The data in (C.1) and (C.2) illustrate gender inequality in the form of stereotypes. This can be seen how the character of a man treats his wife by scolding her violently and freely. This was done because the male character had the view that his wife would not possibly do the same thing to him. He also assumed that he had the right and right to pour out his anger on his wife because he was the one who gave her food.

Indirectly, this assumption gives a negative image to a woman that because her husband is the one who gives food, her husband has the right to do anything to her including scolding her without cause.

A different view is given by [Xu, Zhang, Wu, & Wang \(2019\)](#) which concludes that the character of women and men shows that men's lives are oriented towards adventure, while women's lives are oriented toward romantic relationships. Finally, we demonstrate the social support of gender stereotypes by showing that gender stereotype films are chosen more often and are ranked higher. The way social psychologists and political science scientists theoretically, conceptually and empirically examine the influence of gender stereotypes on the evaluation of female candidates and politicians ([Bauer, 2013](#)). Most important is the unremitting image of men about women as deficiencies in attributes considered important for success in many traditional areas of men - images that form the basis of gender bias in many evaluative decisions. But women are not freed from the influence of gender stereotypes ([Hentschel, Heilman, & Peus, 2019](#)). From the analysis of the data shows the concept of stereotypes which refers to the abuse of a husband towards the woman who acts like his wife. Whereas in the study of Xu, et al more refers to the behavioral orientation between men and women. Whereas Bauer concluded that men have complete authority over women.

### **Gender Inequality in the Form of Violence**

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most prominent human rights violations in all societies. Gender-based violence is violence directed at a person because of his gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls. However, using the 'gender-based' aspect is important because it highlights the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in the inequality of power between women and men.

- (D.1) I have become accustomed to suppressing my feelings of hatred in front of my superiors and I have just released those feelings to them in my office targeting my subordinates, or at home with my targeted wife, just like what I see father done to you, mother. (*Death of His Excellency, the Ex-Minister*; p. 5)

- (D.2) Once my father hit him (when my mother was feeding me on his lap) because my father had repeatedly called my mother to bring her dinner. (*The Greatest Crime*; p. 41)
- (D.3) Do you know how they tortured the girl? Ten men raped her, one by one in turn. They trampled the girl's honor... (*On Camera*, p. 97)
- (D.4) ... and the gaping wound between her thighs. The smell of pus and blood and the stench and odor and sweat of ten men, whose marks of nails were still on his body. (*On Camera*, p. 99)

Data (D.2) illustrates that the father hit his mother because the father had repeatedly called his mother to bring her dinner. The thing experienced by the mother is gender inequality in the form of physical violence. Physical violence also occurs in the events contained in the data (D.4) where there are described wounds on the bodies of women victims of rape. The wound was caused by physical violence by a man who raped himself. While the data (D.3) shows inequality in the form of sexual violence in the form of rape by ten men against a woman.

Physical violence that occurs in the three data above comes from the assumption that men are in a higher position than women so that men feel entitled or allowed to conquer and coerce women. Besides that, the violence also comes from the assumption that women are weak creatures while men are strong creatures so it is not difficult for men to do violence against women with the strength they have. Another form of violence found in the study shows that violence can occur to women related to health ([Garcia-Moreno & Watts, 2011](#)). Gender relations are influenced by culture, education and religion, and often encourage situations of violence, especially against women ([Krob & Steffen, 2015](#)). The morality of religion enshrined by culture legitimizes violence against women, which is an urgent problem in the field of education. Education is needed that does not reproduce gender relations based on a patriarchal system, respect all people and aim for a fairer relationship without violence.

## CONCLUSION

There is a gender inequality that is manifested in 4 forms specifically marginalization, subordination, stereotype, and violence. While gender inequality in the form of workload is not contained in this novel. The four forms of gender inequality are as follows.

1. Gender inequality in the form of marginalization: dismissal by a superior to a female employee whom he considers often expresses a different opinion from him as a superior. His decision made the woman lose her job.
2. Gender inequality in the form of subordination: the position of women who are lower than men especially their husbands towards their wives by considering women as a place to vent their anger.
3. Gender inequality in the form of stereotypes: a negative image that because those who feed women (wives) are men (husbands), the husband has the right to do anything against his wife including scolding her without cause.
4. Gender inequality in the form of violence: physical violence that occurs to a wife committed by her husband and physical violence experienced by a rape victim committed by rapists. In addition to physical violence, another violence that

occurred is sexual violence experienced by a woman who was raped by ten men.

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