

**SUFISM OF LIBERATION: REREADING THE CONCEPT OF
FEMALE CREATION AND GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE ISSUES**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of the creation of women from a Sufi perspective as an effort to prevent gender-based violence. The focus of this study is the concept of the creation of women from a Sufi perspective to understand the role and function of women from the beginning of their creation as an effort to prevent violence against women. The research was conducted using qualitative methods. Data analysis was carried out by thoroughly analyzing Sufi literature that discusses the creation of women. The results of the study show that in Sufism, women were created from nafs wahidah, which is the same self as men. From nafs wahidah, they were then divided into two parts, male and female. Thus, Sufism views them as having the same roles, positions, and rights as caliphs on Earth, because Allah sees humans based on their piety, not their gender. They were created to complement and understand each other in order to achieve a complete life and harmonious relationships as preparation for carrying out their role as caliphs on Earth. As for the roles of men and women that cannot be interchanged, these are roles related to their biological conditions, such as childbirth and breastfeeding

Keywords: *Sufism Liberation, Female Creation, Gender Violence*

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas tentang konsep penciptaan perempuan dalam perspektif tasawuf dan kekerasan berbasis gender. Fokus kajian ini adalah konsep penciptaan perempuan dalam sudut pandang tasawuf untuk memahami peran dan fungsi perempuan dari awal penciptaannya sebagai upaya pencegahan kekerasan yang berbasis gender (kekerasan

terhadap perempuan). Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif. Analisis data dilakukan dengan menganalisis secara mendalam tentang kajian-kajian literatur tasawuf yang membahas tentang penciptaan perempuan. Hasil dari penelitian adalah perempuan dan laki-laki dalam tasawuf diciptakan dari nafs wahidah, yaitu diri yang satu. Dari nafs wahidah tersebut kemudian dijadikan dua bagian laki-laki dan perempuan. Dengan demikian tasawuf memandang mereka memiliki peran, kedudukan dan hak yang sama sebagai khalifah di Bumi, karena Allah melihat manusia dari kualitas ketaqwaannya, bukan dari jenis kelamin. Mereka tercipta untuk saling melengkapi dan saling memahami untuk mendapatkan kehidupan yang utuh dan relasi yang harmonis sebagai bekal menjalankan peran menjadi khalifah di bumi. Adapun peran laki-laki dan perempuan yang tidak dapat dipertukarkan adalah peran yang terkait dengan kondisi biologis mereka, seperti melahirkan dan menyusui.

Kata Kunci: *Tasawuf Pembebasan, Penciptaan Perempuan, Kekerasan Gender*

Introduction

Gender-based violence has become a widespread global issue. This issue occurs across various layers of society, from the lower-middle to upper-middle classes. The term "gender" became known in the 90s following the emergence of the feminist movement. This movement was born from demands for justice for women in various aspects of life who felt colonized, marginalized, and subordinated. Marginalization is a process that sidelines women due to an understanding of gender concepts equated with "sex" (biological sex) as human nature (*kodrat*). Subordination is the valuation of a specific gender role as lower than another; in this case, women are considered to have lower roles than men. (Afandi et al., 2019)

Understanding "sex" as a fixed nature (*kodrat*) and the concept of "gender" are two different things. *Kodrat* is something given by God that cannot be changed or exchanged, whereas gender relates to the traits attached to an individual. These traits can change and are not absolute like biological sex. Social construction in society forms certain traits to carry specific roles and obligations, such as the idea that women are gentle and affectionate, making them "suitable" for domestic work. Conversely, men, possessing stronger physical builds, are considered more suitable for work outside the home. From the perspective of science regarding brain structure, organs, and the human body, this opinion is not entirely wrong; the error lies in when these roles are treated as absolute obligations, leading to discrimination against women. Women are often considered unsuitable for high careers or education because of their "nature" as women. (Putriana & Ariani, 2023)

In English dictionaries, there is no fundamental difference between the terms "gender" and "sex," as both mean biological sex. However, the difference in meaning must be explained in detail to gain a clear understanding of the problems and injustices against women caused by gender differences. Sex refers to biological differences or *kodrat*. It is inherent and unchangeable—for example, men have a penis and sperm, while women have breasts, a vagina, and undergo menstruation. Gender refers to the traits and character of an individual influenced by environment, society, education, and culture, resulting in individual roles and functions in work and society. Thus, gender is the changeable difference in roles between men and women. (Ayu Dwi Putri Rusman 2022)

Gender is a concept describing the relationship between men and women, including differences in roles, responsibilities, and obligations. It is a social construction, interchangeable because it is not innate, and changeable. These differences are formed by social and cultural structures. At this point, the distinction between gender and sex (*kodrat*) is understood. (Zaitunah Subhan, 2015) The concept of gender is not meant to violate nature but to return nature to its true position and carry out the roles of men and women equally in society. (Murfi, 2014)

The rapid development of technology has also contributed to the rise of gender-based violence. Violence occurs both directly (face-to-face) and indirectly (through the digital world). This includes physical, psychological, and sexual violence, exploitation, neglect, and Human Trafficking (TPPO). According to data published by the Family Information System of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (SIGA KEMENPPPA), the rate of violence against women (KTP) continues to rise annually. In 2021, there were 10,241 cases; in 2022, 11,226 cases; in 2023, 11,441 cases; and in 2024, there were 12,161 cases. (KEMENPPPA, 2025)

The increasing cases of violence are inseparable from inherited social constructions and patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is a system of total dominance and control over women. Some regions in Indonesia believe men have the "nature" of being leaders and heads of households responsible for earning a living, while women's "nature" is as housewives responsible for the home and serving family members. Javanese society shares this view; a woman's life as a housewife is limited by culture to the kitchen, the well, and the bed—known in Java as *masak*, *macak*, *manak* (cooking, dressing up, and giving birth) to please

and serve the husband. Domestic tasks are considered easier and lower than men's work, which often leads to the belief that women do not need high education. Stigmas regarding domestic work mean that women who work or have careers face a "double burden," as they are still expected to complete domestic chores. Conversely, men's role as breadwinners frees them from domestic work, even if both partners work. Fundamentally, *kodrat* (nature) is something fixed by Allah and cannot be changed, such as biological sex; it is not related to human roles in social environments. (Nur Rofiah, 2009)

Gender-based violence is also caused by erroneous religious understandings. Patriarchal culture marginalizes women and views them as subordinate to men. The creation of Eve, the first woman, from Adam's rib has become the basis for thoughts that women were created unequal to men. Stories of Adam's fall to Earth often marginalize women as the party to blame. Furthermore, low socio-economic status and unmet household needs contribute significantly to domestic violence against women. (Wella Adestia Fitri, 2024)

Islam emerged as a liberator from the oppression of women, though discrimination in the name of religion still occurs today. Injustices in society against women are not religious teachings but misunderstandings in interpreting religion. (Zaitunah Subhan, 2015). In interpreting women, Sufis have broader perspectives; they do not just interpret the Qur'an textually, but conceptually and from an internal side. In the view of Sufism, Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* fundamentally does not differentiate between men and women. Islam positions women as partners to men. Sufis do not see women as weak; while fewer Sufi works were authored by women, some male Sufis, like Ibn 'Arabi, had female spiritual teachers like Fatimah. (Ibn 'Arabi, 2018). Islam teaches that Allah judges humans by the quality of their faith and piety, not their biological sex or physical strength. The creation of both has the same purpose: to worship. (Fadil & Alawi, 2023).

This topic was chosen because gender-based violence remains prevalent. A lack of understanding regarding the concept of female creation results in errors regarding women's roles in households and social settings. The purpose of this writing is to provide an understanding of the actual concept of female creation from a Sufi perspective. This understanding is expected to provide a complete picture of female roles and functions, serving as a solution to prevent violence against women.

Literature Review

Research on violence against women is extensive. Wella Adestia Fitri and Rahma Syafitri, in "Analysis of Causes of Violence against Women in Lingga Regency," explain that factors include economic status, socio-culture, low education, and minimal legal awareness. Unstable household economics trigger conflicts leading to violence. Women entirely dependent on husbands for finances tend to stay despite violence. Cultures viewing men as superior cause women to have low value in society, leading social environments to normalize violence. Wella notes violence is more common among women with low education, which correlates with a lack of understanding of women's rights and how to face violence. Many lack understanding of legal mechanisms, making cases difficult to handle. (Wella Adestia Fitri, 2024)

Cholid Fadil (2023), in "Feminism in Sufism: A Literature Review," studied various Sufi literatures on feminism. The result shows that in Sufism, "feminine" and "masculine" are not seen from biological sex but are centered on the condition of the human soul in its role as a servant of Allah. (Fadil & Alawi, 2023).

Ahmad Faisol (2021), in "Women and Sufism: Measuring Gender Bias in Sufism Studies," discusses women's status in Sufism. He concludes that men and women have equal relations; neither is superior, as they were created to complete each other through love. (Faesol, 2021)

Research Methodology

This is library research using qualitative methods. Data was taken from various books, articles, and documents related to the topic. Data analysis used descriptive analysis; obtained data was reduced, reviewed, analyzed in depth, and presented in the form of descriptions, images, and tables. (Alaslan et al., 2023)

Research Results and Discussion

Violence Against Women

Gender concepts have been a main discussion for decades and are included in social and health development analysis. Gender-based violence is a global crisis and a human rights violation. It is based on power imbalances leading to discrimination. Generations have passed down patriarchal culture,

which contributes greatly to this violence. This violence is rooted in social structures, norms, and values. (Munasaroh, 2022)

Violence against women is grouped into three areas: family, society, and state. Family violence occurs within the household by close relatives (husband, parents, children, siblings) and includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, and neglect. Social violence occurs in communities and includes sexual violence, prostitution, trafficking, and violence against female laborers. State violence is that committed or permitted by the state, including violence in detention or conflict zones. (Nur Rofiah, 2009).

Rapid technology creates new spaces for gender-based violence. It is no longer just conventional but digital. The Association For Progressive Communications (APC) explains online gender violence as threats or harassment via text, photos, voice messages, and videos using ICT (mobile phones, social media, internet). Online gender-based violence (KBGO) results in negative impacts like depression, fear, and anxiety. (Putri et al., 2023)

According to the WHO, violence is an action by individuals or groups using physical force. KEMENPPPA defines violence against women as violence based on biological sex differences resulting in suffering for women physically, psychologically, or sexually, including rights deprivation and threats in personal or public spheres. Types include:

- a. Physical Violence: Pain or injury (mild, moderate, or severe)
- b. Psychological Violence: Fear, lack of confidence, helplessness, or severe suffering
- c. Sexual Violence: Coercion, threats, or emotional manipulation within or outside the household
- d. Neglect: Actions leading to economic dependence (forbidding work) to keep the victim under control, resulting in unmet physical, mental, or spiritual needs.
- e. Exploitation: Exploiting without consent for profit (physical, sexual, or reproductive)
- f. Human Trafficking (TPPO): Criminal acts under Law No. 21 of 2007.
- g. Other Violence: Coercion through words, writing, images, symbols, or gestures causing fear or restricting freedom (KEMENPPPA, 2025)

Data on gender-based violence experienced by women, as reported by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KEMENPPA)

and the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), can be found in the following tables, graphs, and figures:

Tabel 1.

Gender-Based Violence Data Against Women

Sphere	VAW	Reporting Data	Prosecution Data	Verdict Data	Total
Personal	2.010	16.299	96	291.111	309.516
Public	1.335	10.605		64	12.004
State	95	76		38	209
NA		8368			8368
Total	38.788		96	291.213	330.097

(Source: Komnas Perempuan Annual Notes)

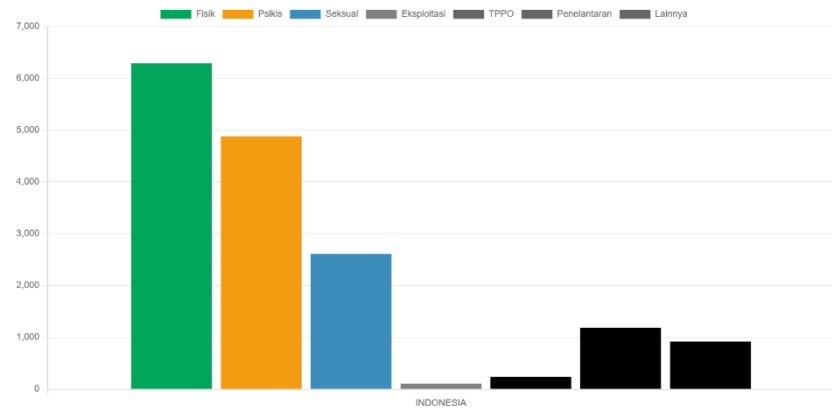


Figure 1. Graph of total violence against women by type of violence experienced

(Source: Gender and Children Information System, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection)

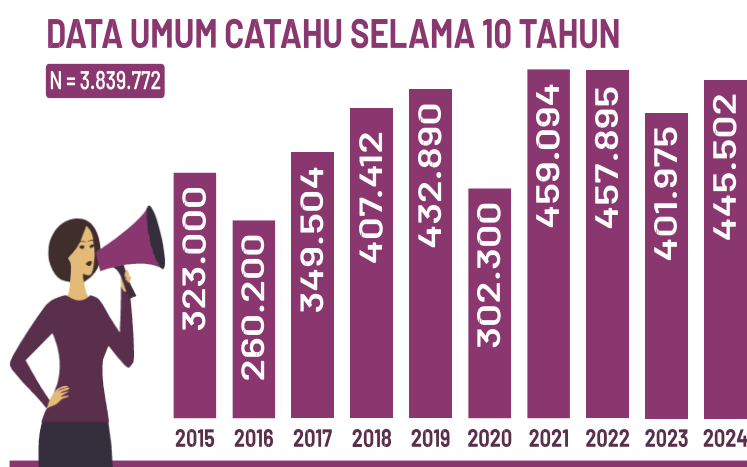


Figure 2. Graph of total violence against women in general over the last 10 years (Source: National Commission on Violence Against Women Annual Report)

As of December 2024, KEMENPPPA recorded 3,123 victims, with the highest in Jakarta (882), West Java (313), and Central Java (210). Types included physical (1,662), psychological (1,317), sexual (666), other (180), TPPO (103), and exploitation (27). Victims ranged from ages 18 to 60+. By age: 18-24 (31.03%), 25-44 (56.42%), 45-59 (11.43%), and 60+ (1.12%). Locations: households (73.52%), other (15.56%), and public facilities (6.56%). Marital status: married (63.78%), divorced (6.82%), single (26.00%), and other (3.39%) (KEMENPPPA, 2025)

Sufism as Liberation

In viewing women's status, Sufism is friendlier and more flexible than exoteric scholars. Religious behavior based on the Qur'an has two aspects: exoteric (external rituals like prayer, fasting, zakat, haji) and esoteric (internal, spiritual, and Sufi-oriented). Perfect Islam balances both. Ideally, one should understand Islam comprehensively to contribute goodness to the social environment. The peak of religious attitude is when one prioritizes esoteric/Sufi aspects to understand wisdom, yielding a wise character. (Siraj, 2025)

Sufism provides a fundamental perspective on the roles of men and women. In the Qur'an:

وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

And of all things We created two mates; perhaps you will remember.

The creation in pairs signifies that nothing is complete or perfect without the existence of the other. (Murata, 1996) Sufism teaches moderate, non-discriminatory Islam. It brings a fresh perspective to gender paradigms where "masculine" is tied to strength and "feminine" to weakness. Sufism does not differentiate based on biological sex but focuses on the heart (*qalbu*) and spiritual state. Men and women have the same obligations and status in worship:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسْكِنٌ طَيِّبٌ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those—Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but acceptance from Allah is greater. That is the great attainment. (At Taubah, 71-72). (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia., 2019)

Explains that believing men and women are allies to one another, enjoining good and forbidding evil, performing prayer, and giving zakat. They are promised mercy and Paradise. This explains they have the same roles, status, and duties. Their task is to uphold truth and prevent evil to strengthen social morality. Required zakat for women shows they have the right to own wealth (Hendri, 2018). Sufism teaches humans have equal honor and degrees. Allah sees piety, not biological sex. They were created to understand, not compete for superiority. (Hendri, 2018)

Sufism teaches that all humans possess equal honor and rank in the sight of Allah. Allah perceives His servants based on their piety (*taqwa*) and spiritual quality, rather than their gender or physical strength. Furthermore, they are created to understand one another, not to compete in demonstrating that one is superior or stronger than the other. (Hendri, 2018)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ
O mankind! Indeed, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted (Al Hujurat. 13)

Sufism emphasizes the internal aspects and perceives the very essence of the human soul. Every human being possesses both masculine and feminine dimensions within themselves. Sufism teaches us to embrace both sides rather than turning them into a point of contention or conflict. The masculine and feminine exist to engage in a dialogue, creating a harmonious relationship filled with peace, tranquility, and mutual completion. It is the union of these two that makes life more meaningful and prevents various forms of gender-based violence and conflict. The masculine and feminine are manifestations of the *Jalal* and *Jamal* attributes of Allah. *Jalal* represents Power and Majesty (masculine), while *Jamal* represents Beauty and Grace (feminine). Both are integral parts of the Sublime Attributes of Allah (Jalil & Azis, 2019). The dialectic between *Jalal* and *Jamal* within a human being will lead them to the station of *Al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human). At this stage, one no longer perceives outward aspects related to the physical body or gender. Instead, one perceives the essence of creation: that humans are created by Allah and shall return to Allah. One returns to their primordial nature (*fitrah*) and to their Lord; this is the true meaning of the hadith often cited by Sufis: 'Whosoever knows themselves, knows their Lord' (Hendri, 2018)

Jalaluddin Rumi analogizes men and women to heaven and earth; neither is superior. Earth grows civilization; women have wombs and give birth. Human generations arise from their cooperation. (Sauantri, 2022) Sufism teaches *Mahabbah* (love) and *Rahmah* (mercy), which are foundations for peaceful, empathetic communication and social harmony. (Nurani et al., 2025)

Creation of Women in Sufism

In the *Jahiliyah* era, women were treated as sex objects. Prophet Muhammad taught kindness toward them. Women were not just wives; the Prophet's wives were active socially, in trade, narrating hadith, and even war. Women have their own rights and duties, just like men. Islam does not teach dichotomy or discrimination. (Agustin Hanapi, 2015).

Contemporary feminist commentators are revisiting verses previously interpreted textually by classical scholars, placing women in friendly positions without ignoring their responsibilities, based on the belief that the Qur'an is suitable for all times and places. (Hendri, 2018)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and (cherish) the ties of kinship. Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer

Qur'an states humans were created from "one soul" (*nafsin wahidah*). There are different interpretations of *nafsin wahidah*. One says Allah created Adam first, then Eve from Adam's rib. Another says it refers to the "self," not a physical body; the human self was one, then divided into two parts. Thus, they become whole when they reunite/complement each other. (Hamka, 1979) Creation from a "crooked rib" is a metaphor. It does not mean women are deviant; it refers to more sensitive emotions for roles like pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding. Men should face this with wisdom, patience, and gentleness. Quraish Shihab notes if this difference is not realized, men might force women to follow male logic, often resulting in violence. They must complement each other for a harmonious relation. (Nurkholidah, 2023)

The single soul, which was divided into two—male and female—is then reunited to become the starting point for human multiplication. This union must be grounded in a consciousness of *taqwa* (God-consciousness), which preserves life and sanctifies the meeting of man and woman. In the aforementioned verse, Hamka highlights two key points: first, the creation itself, and second, *arham*, interpreted as compassion or *silaturrahim* (the bond established between men and women). Allah created humanity based on the foundation of mercy and compassion (*rahim*). (Hamka, 1979).

The *rahim* (womb) also serves as the principle of creation and the root of existence; Allah created the Universe upon the foundation of compassion. Through the unique attributes possessed by women, it can be said that women are a part of the perfection of Allah's manifestation. (Ibn 'Arabi, 2004) The revelation of the Qur'an affirmed a profound appreciation for women and restored their dignity. Their birth is no longer met with the threat of death, as seen in the traditions of the *Jahiliyyah* era; for although men and women differ, in essence, they are one—created to complement and complete one another. (Hamka, 1979)

Ibn Arabi, in *Futuh al Makiyah*, explains both come from the same reality, starting from and returning to Allah. He likens them to a circle where points are connected to create perfection. (Ibn 'Arabi, 2018) A man is not perfect without a woman and vice-versa. The Prophet stated women were

among the things he loved; this means human perfection is tied to others as they complement each other. (Ibn 'Arabi, 2004)

Conclusion

Gender-based violence against women is influenced by environment, culture, and lack of understanding of rights. Sufism offers a liberating solution from patriarchal imprisonment by being more humanist and friendly to women. Understanding the Sufi view of female creation enables harmonious dialogue where roles, functions, and rights are understood, preventing violence. The author suggests more gender research within religion and Sufism, as violence still occurs behind religious dogmas.

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