



## The Novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto: Discrimination, Helplessness, and Death

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**ABSTRACT:** Literary works reflect the complexity of human life and often mirror social realities, including the phenomena of discrimination and helplessness. Discrimination within the family can have a profound psychological impact on individuals, and in some cases, may even lead to death. This study aims to analyze the forms of discrimination experienced by Rafa as the eldest child, identify the helplessness he feels due to maternal pressure, and interpret the meaning of his death in the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto. The study employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic method, which interprets texts by moving from the apparent meaning to deeper, hidden meanings. Data were collected using reading and note-taking techniques, then analyzed based on the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the discrimination experienced by Rafa reflects injustice in the parenting of firstborn children, who are often expected to be perfect without space for failure. Such pressure evolves into helplessness, a loss of self-worth, and ultimately, despair leading to death. The implications of this research highlight the importance of fair and supportive parenting within the family to prevent harmful psychological effects, as well as the need for collective awareness to recognize and avoid subtle forms of discrimination against children.

**KEYWORDS:** Discrimination, Helplessness, Death, Firstborn Child, *Our Home* Novel

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works, as reflections of human life and experience, possess the power to convey profound messages about the complexity and dynamics of human existence. According to Hidayati et al. (2021), literature, as a form of self-expression through language, reflects various aspects of human life ranging from observed realities, boundless imagination, to the fusion of both. Based on these expert opinions, it can be concluded that literature is a medium of self-expression that mirrors both the reality of human life and the author's imagination, with the ability to deliver deep messages about life's complexities and dynamics. Human beings and literature are deeply interconnected. Literature is born from human imagination not only to entertain but also to educate. Therefore, literary studies are essential as they help deepen our understanding of social issues and the development of human thought. Through literature, we can explore life problems such as social conflict, morality, and identity, presented in compelling narratives. Azzahra et al. (2023) affirm that literary analysis can be conducted on all forms of literary work, including novels. Sundari & Hasibuan (2022) state that novels are a type of literary work containing a series of stories presented through imaginative narration. The stories within novels are often the author's interpretation of social reality, manifested through literary form. Fajriyah et al. (2017) further explain that novels represent life journeys, including events and behaviors experienced or performed by characters.

In several cases, literature often portrays facts about violence and discrimination occurring in society. Awan I (2018) found that discrimination experienced by individuals not only causes physical harm but also significantly affects the psychological well-being of victims. This impact may manifest as emotional distress, low self-esteem, and loss of self-confidence. In more extreme cases, the psychological burden of discrimination may even lead to death. For example, in the novel *Bagaimana Cara Mengurangi Berat Badan* by Amalia Yunus, the main character's experience of social discrimination results in shame, self-deprecation, identity crisis, and feelings of alienation from society (Dewi & Sugiarti, 2025). This illustrates that literature is not merely a narrative medium but also a mirror of social reality. Literature serves as a record of social phenomena, illustrating how discrimination and oppression affect individuals, families, and communities as a whole. Therefore, issues of discrimination and human oppression are highly significant and deserve critical attention. Literary perspectives on such phenomena can raise awareness about their harmful effects and the urgency of social change in pursuit of justice for all.

In this regard, *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto is a literary work grounded in contemporary social realities. The novel presents the life of a stepchild who becomes the eldest son in a family, focusing primarily on the experiences of Rafa, a character who frequently faces various forms of discrimination throughout his life. The discrimination Rafa endures takes place within his family and is primarily perpetrated by his own mother. Familial and social pressures have a profoundly negative effect on his mental and emotional well-being. Thus, the phenomena of discrimination and internal helplessness, along with their impact on human life particularly in literature require deeper interpretation. Literature functions both as a reflection of reality and as a fictional expression of the author's imagination, often presenting alternative portrayals of such phenomena. Therefore, examining discrimination and helplessness as portrayed in literature, such as in *Our Home*, is highly relevant to broadening our understanding of how literature reflects social realities and allows for exploration of vital humanitarian issues.

For these reasons, this study aims to explore the novel *Our Home* from the perspective of discrimination and its impact on the individual. This research focus is crucial, as discrimination and its psychological effects on individuals are significant concerns that demand serious attention. Discrimination is a persistent social issue that not only disrupts individual well-being but also threatens social harmony more broadly. Based on the background outlined above, the research problems addressed in this study are as follows: (1) How is discrimination against the eldest child and its negative effects on the individual represented through the character Rafa in *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto, (2) How is helplessness as the eldest child reflected in Rafa's experiences of maternal pressure in the novel, (3) Why does Rafa choose to end his life, and how can this death be interpreted within the context of the pressure and helplessness he experiences as the eldest child. The objectives of this study are to: (1) Analyze the discrimination experienced by Rafa as the eldest child in *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto, (2) Identify Rafa's helplessness in dealing with his mother's pressure, and (3) Interpret the meaning of Rafa's death in the context of the pressure and helplessness he faces as the eldest child. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide deeper insight into the psychological impact of familial discrimination on an individual's emotional and mental development, and to demonstrate how literature serves as a mirror to complex social issues

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative research approach. According to Abdussamad & Sik (2021), qualitative research focuses more on the quality of the research, such as values, meaning, human emotions, the appreciation of artistic beauty, historical value, and more. Niam et al. (2024) explain that unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes measurement and numerical data analysis, qualitative research prioritizes the understanding of concepts and social processes. Based on these expert views, it can be concluded that qualitative research is an approach that emphasizes deep understanding of meaning, values, emotions, and social processes, focusing on the quality of data rather than numerical measurement. The research method applied in this study is the hermeneutic method. According to Nasution (2023), research methods refer to scientific ways of obtaining data for specific purposes and applications. Hermeneutics is the science or theory of interpreting texts. Paul Ricoeur, as cited in Simega (2013), defines hermeneutics as a method of understanding that moves from apparent and explicit meanings toward deeper, hidden meanings. The objects of interpretation in the broadest sense may include symbols in dreams, cultural myths, or literary works.

The data used in this study consist of textual representations of discrimination, helplessness, and death. The primary source of data is the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto. Data collection was conducted using the reading and note-taking technique. The reading process began with reading the entire novel to gain a general understanding of the story (Hanifa et al., 2023). This was followed by a careful and detailed reading to identify elements of discrimination, helplessness, and death that are the main focus of the research. Relevant data were collected in the form of direct quotations from the novel and were systematically recorded in prepared data tables (Layali et al., 2021). For data analysis, this study refers to the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. Data collection was carried out using the aforementioned reading and note-taking technique. Once the data were collected, the next stage was data reduction, which involved selecting, summarizing, and focusing only on information relevant to the research focus. The reduced data were then displayed in the form of tables and narrative descriptions to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships among the elements under study. Subsequently, preliminary conclusions were drawn and then verified using relevant theories to test the validity of the data. The results of this verification process formed the basis for the final conclusions of this study (Safarudin Rizal et al., 2023)

## **3. RESULTS**

### **a. Discrimination: Negative Impact on the Individual**

Discrimination, according to Ihromi in Ridwan & Aslinda (2022), is a form of attitude or behavior that violates human rights. Yulinar et al. (2021) state that discrimination essentially refers to unequal treatment. From these definitions, it can be concluded that discrimination is the act of treating individuals or groups differently in a way that violates the principles of human rights. In this context, Rafa is treated differently due to his position as the eldest child. The excessive pressure placed on him by his mother such as high expectations and demands can be classified as a form of discrimination, especially when these demands are disproportionate and negatively affect his well-being, infringing upon the child's right to grow and develop in a healthy manner.

This kind of unequal treatment is often experienced by firstborn children, who, according to Siregar (2011), are expected to serve as parental figures for their younger siblings. As the eldest son, Rafa is burdened with the expectation to be a perfect role model. These expectations are intensified by his position in a single-parent household, where he is not only required to assist his mother with household responsibilities but also to care for and guide his younger siblings. This situation creates a significant psychological and emotional burden. If not properly managed, it can harm the child's mental well-being and personal development.

**Table 1. Discrimination (Mother's Pressure) in the Novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto**

No	Indicator	Form of Discrimination	Code
1.	High Academic Demands	Rafa was required to maintain extremely high academic standards, even beyond reasonable limits.	OU.91/HAD:01
		Rafa was expected to consistently achieve perfect grades.	OU.115/HAD:02
		Rafa's mother required him to study continuously, disregarding his developmental needs for rest and play appropriate to his age.	OU.115/HAD:03
2.	A Heavy Responsibility	Responsibilities that are inappropriate for his age. The eldest child, still in high school, takes on the role of head of the household and bears the responsibilities of a mother.	OU.03/AHR:01
		Discrimination in this situation is a form of role discrimination against Rafa as the eldest child. He is burdened with responsibilities that should fall on adults, such as acting as a guardian for his younger siblings, which is not appropriate for his age and role within the family.	OU.71/AHR:02
		Rafa is responsible for taking care of all the family members.	OU.221/AHR:03
		As the eldest child, Rafa made up his mind to earn an income to help his mother.	OU.221/AHR:04
3.	Unequal Treatment	Comparison with other children	OU.86/UT:01
		The unequal treatment of Rafa and his siblings by their mother. The third child receives attention and medical care, while Rafa, as the eldest, is emotionally hurt.	OU.76/UT:02
		Ayus, as a mother, blames Rafa for the injury experienced by Nolan.	OU.81/UT:03
4.	Physical Violence	Ayas's hands gripped Rafa's arms tightly, her eyes burning with fury.	OU.81/PV:01
		Rafa's body was slammed to the floor by his mother, causing him pain. This action degraded Rafa's dignity and violated his right to protection from violence.	OU.82/PV:02
		Rafa's body was shoved by his mother without permission.	OU.129/PV:03
		Rafa's small body was struck by his mother without mercy.	OU.129/PV:04
		The mother inflicted physical violence on Rafa using a belt, intentionally and repeatedly.	OU.129/PV:05

Based on the data from Table 1, it shows several forms of discrimination experienced by Rafa as the eldest child, such as high academic demands that arise from the pressure imposed by his mother, who expects perfection. Data (OU.91/HAD:01) shows that Rafa is required to maintain a very high academic standard, even exceeding reasonable limits, to the point where any small failure is considered something very threatening and frightening. Data (OU.115/HAD:02) illustrates the discrimination of high academic demands, creating excessive pressure on Rafa, where he must achieve perfect scores, specifically a score of 100. If Rafa receives a

score even just two points lower, his mother would scold him. The demand for constant studying, which disregards the need for rest and play, reflects high academic pressure because it prioritizes academics excessively, neglecting the child's needs, creating constant learning pressure, and setting an imbalanced standard of living (OU.115/HAD:03).

In the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto, in addition to the discrimination of high academic demands, there is also the discrimination of heavy responsibilities. According to Rini Agus (2012), the eldest child is expected to help the parents care for, educate, and set a good example for their younger siblings, making them tend to obey rules. In data (OU.03/AHR:01), it is depicted that Rafa's family is a single-parent family, with his mother being so busy with work that she forgets to come home, causing Rafa, as the eldest child, to take on the role of head of the household, or even assume the duties of a mother. Data (OU.71/AHR:02) describes the discrimination of heavy responsibility, as Rafa, as the eldest child, is burdened with roles that should not be his responsibility at his age. Rafa feels that he must act as a guardian for his troubled younger sibling, even though he himself is still a teenager and should be focusing on his education and personal development. This heavy burden shows an imbalance in the distribution of responsibilities within the family, where Rafa is forced to assume the role of an adult, sacrificing his time and emotions to take care of his younger sibling's issues. Similarly, in data (OU.71/AHR:02), Rafa is responsible for his sibling, and in data (OU.221/AHR:03), it is depicted that Rafa is responsible for caring for all family members. He must take care of his sibling who just returned from the hospital and manage his mother's return from the hospital. Data (OU.221/AHR:04) explains that although Rafa is still a teenager, he is determined to earn money to help the family financially after his mother became unable to work due to illness. This responsibility burdens Rafa with having to replace the role of an adult in the family, a burden that should not fall on a child his age.

Another form of discrimination is unequal treatment. In data (OU.86/UT:01), it is depicted that unequal treatment occurs because the mother expects the eldest child to replace her, with the demand that this child should be superior to others of the same age. This situation creates a difference in treatment between the eldest child and the younger siblings, where the eldest is burdened with very high expectations, while the younger siblings do not face the same pressure. This leads to injustice in the distribution of attention and expectations within the family. Data (OU.76/UT:02) illustrates unequal treatment because the mother gives more attention to the third child by healing his physical wounds, while the eldest child is emotionally and physically hurt. This comparison creates an injustice in treatment, where the eldest feels neglected and not given the same attention, even though they also need support. Data (OU.81/UT:03) shows unequal treatment because Ayas blames Rafa for the injury Nolan sustained, even though Rafa is not the sole party responsible. This action creates an injustice in the distribution of responsibilities among the children, where Rafa, as the eldest child, is unfairly burdened with the blame for something that is not entirely his fault.

Another form of discrimination is physical violence. According to Rahmi (2021), physical violence refers to acts that involve the use of the body or physical force to harm others. Data (OU.81/PV:01) depicts physical violence, as Ayas grips Rafa's arms tightly, which is a form of physical contact that threatens and causes pain or discomfort. This action demonstrates the use of physical strength to control or intimidate Rafa. Jannah & Iqbal (2020) state that physical violence causes pain, injury, wounds, or disabilities, and even leads to death. In data (OU.82/PV:02), the physical violence inflicted by Ayas causes Rafa pain. Such violence not only injures the body physically but also impacts Rafa's mental and emotional condition. Data (OU.129/PV:03) illustrates physical violence when Ayas pushes Rafa harshly without permission, causing Rafa's body to be thrown and fall onto the bed. This act shows the abuse of physical power, causing Rafa to fall and likely experience pain. This action violates Rafa's right to be treated with respect and without violence. Data (OU.129/PV:04) and (OU.129/PV:05) describe the physical violence Ayas inflicts on Rafa, where Rafa's small body is struck with a belt. This aligns with the definition provided by Kadir & Handayaningsih (2020) of physical violence against children, which includes torture, beating, and abuse with certain objects that cause physical wounds. In data (OU.129/PV:04), Rafa curls up tightly, indicating that he feels fear and threat. The sound of the belt hitting and his screams echoing throughout the house signal the physical suffering he experiences. In data (OU.129/PV:05), the belt continuously touches Rafa's skin, still covered by his shirt, illustrating repeated and relentless violence, which may cause wounds or even serious injury. This action is not only physically painful but also violates Rafa's right to be treated with love and protection.

In this case, the pressures Rafa experiences have a negative impact on him. The high academic demands, driven by his mother's expectations of perfection, create an unrealistic burden, where even the smallest failure is seen as a major threat. Additionally, the family responsibilities that should have been handled by the parents further weigh heavily on him. From a social aspect, Rafa appears to be increasingly isolated and introverted, as much of his time is spent fulfilling responsibilities that he should not bear at his age, leaving him with little opportunity for interaction with peers. According to Anggun Lestari et al. (2022), adolescence is a crucial phase in life, as it is a time when individuals seek their identity and life purpose. Therefore, during this period, individuals must be able to explore interests, build social relationships, and develop themselves to face future challenges. Placing heavy responsibilities on adolescents can hinder these essential processes, potentially leading to long-lasting mental and emotional disturbances.

Moreover, unequal treatment between siblings can generate feelings of injustice. The different treatment from his mother towards Rafa and his younger siblings, coupled with the physical abuse Rafa endured, exacerbates his situation. Rafa feels neglected, lacks the emotional support he deserves, and even bears the blame for mistakes that are not entirely his responsibility. The physical violence he suffers adds to the pain and trauma, both physical and psychological, further stressing his mental condition. In Rafa's

case, it is evident that placing excessive burdens and responsibilities on a teenager can have detrimental effects on their mental and emotional health. Therefore, as parents, it is crucial to provide a reasonable amount of responsibility that aligns with the child's age and capacity, so they can grow healthily, both physically and emotionally, and have the opportunity to develop and build a better future.

**b. Helplessness: Authoritarian Parenting Style**

The theory of learned helplessness, as proposed by Martin Seligman in Ramadhani Putri (2023), states that helplessness occurs when a person feels they have no control or influence over the outcomes of the situation they face. In this context, a person feels that their efforts or actions will not affect the desired result, leading to feelings of despair and resignation. As explained by Krismayanti (2021), helplessness arises when a person believes that their actions or efforts will not bring about meaningful change, making it difficult for them to control the situation. One of the factors contributing to learned helplessness is the parenting style, particularly an authoritarian one. According to Baumrind (as cited in Husnatul Jannah, 2012; Kia & Murniarti, 2020), an authoritarian parenting style is one that emphasizes complete obedience from children to the parents' rules and commands, without allowing the children the freedom to ask questions or express their opinions. As a result, Pardede (2020) argues that overly authoritarian parenting can have significant impacts on a child's psychological development. While the effects can be positive, such as obedience and discipline, the negative impacts are often more dominant, such as feelings of pressure and low self-esteem. These negative effects frequently foster a sense of helplessness in children, where they feel they have no freedom to make decisions or control their own lives. Below is a table of data showing Rafa's helplessness in the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto.

**Table 2: Helplessness in the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto**

No	Indicator	Form of Helplessness	Code
1.	Resignation to Demands	Did not resist when pressured to achieve high grades.	OU.128/RTO:01
		Did not resist when instructed to attend tutoring sessions.	OU.59/RTO:02
		Offered no resistance when his mother forcefully pulled his hair.	OU.128/RTO:03
2.	Perceived Lack of Control or Influence.	Rafa experienced a sense of helplessness when, despite his younger siblings being at fault, he was consistently the one who received the reprimands.	OU.59/APLCI:01
		He had no other choice but to apologize, even though he felt emotionally pressured.	OU.81/APLCI:02
		He was forced to follow his conscience, even though it did not align with his true desires.	OU.91/APLCI:03
		He was unable to challenge or contradict his parents.	OU.115/APLCI:04

Based on the data presented in Table 2, several forms of helplessness experienced by Rafa as the eldest child are highlighted. For example, data (OU.128/RTO:01) shows that helplessness arises because Rafa feels pressured. He resigns himself to meeting his mother's expectations in terms of academic performance, even though Rafa might feel that his grades are already good enough or reflect the effort he has put in. In line with the demand for high academic standards, Rafa is also required to study hard. In addition to studying at school, he is obligated to attend tutoring sessions. Data (OU.59/RTO:02) reveals that Rafa feels helpless when his mother forces him to attend tutoring sessions, even on his day off. Data (OU.128/RTO:03) illustrates that Rafa's helplessness emerges due to mistreatment, such as his hair being pulled by his mother, leaving him powerless to respond or resist. Rafa resigns himself to what happens to him and believes that it is fate or something that must be accepted without the ability to do anything. According to Hermayanti Gita (2021), many children who experience violence and harsh treatment from adults can only resign themselves. In such cases, children who face abuse from their parents will not dare to retaliate.

Helplessness in the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto, in addition to resignation to demands, also includes a sense of having no control or influence. Data (OU.59/APLCI:01) reflects a feeling deeply related to helplessness. Rafa, as the eldest child, feels powerless in a situation where, despite not being at fault, he still receives scolding. Rafa feels that no matter what he does, the outcome will always be the same scolding. Eventually, Rafa feels resigned and loses hope of improving the situation. Data (OU.81/APLCI:02) illustrates a situation where Rafa feels he has no choice or control over what happens around him. Rafa can only apologize because he feels there is no alternative or way to defend himself, and he can only accept or follow the existing demands.



Data (OU.91/ APLCI:03) shows that Rafa feels compelled to follow his inner urges, even though it makes him uncomfortable and fearful. This sense of being trapped and having no control over his actions reflects helplessness. Rafa feels that there is no other option but to comply with what arises in his heart, and he also feels that he cannot do anything to change the situation. This reflects the loss of personal control, which is at the core of learned helplessness theory by Seligman. Data (OU.115/ APLCI:04) explains that his form of helplessness is characterized by submissive behavior and an inability to resist or oppose his parents. In this case, Rafa is bound by conditions or rules that are seen as absolute and unquestionable, such as the obligation to respect parents according to Islamic teachings.

The helplessness experienced by Rafa illustrates how external factors, particularly authoritarian parenting styles, can affect an individual's psychological development, especially in terms of self-control and decision-making. This phenomenon is not only relevant in the context of fiction but also reflects social realities that frequently occur in daily life, particularly among children and adolescents raised in families with authoritarian or highly demanding parenting styles. One clear aspect in this case is how helplessness arises due to excessive demands, a common occurrence in real life, especially in the context of education. Many children, particularly those who live in families with extremely high academic standards, feel pressured and powerless when trying to meet their parents' expectations. This is depicted in Rafa, who has tried his best to fulfill his duties by attending tutoring sessions and studying harder, but still fails or cannot meet his mother's expectations. As a result, Rafa's helplessness emerges from the belief that no matter what he does, it will not be enough to change his situation or fulfill the demands placed on him. This finding aligns with research by Vina Muslikhah et al. (2024), who identified similar symptoms in the character Rhea. Rhea experienced a loss of hope and helplessness after all her efforts to make her father proud ended in rejection and anger, triggering emotional trauma. Both Rafa and Rhea experience psychological pressure from unrealistic family expectations, which leads to feelings of failure and worthlessness.

Rafa's helplessness in facing mistreatment from his mother also reflects a reality often seen in imbalanced child-parent relationships. Cases of domestic violence or abusive treatment of children, such as the hair-pulling incident involving Rafa, still occur frequently in society. Children who experience physical or emotional abuse often feel resigned and helpless, as Rafa did, because they are unable to fight back or change the treatment they receive. This highlights the critical role of parents in providing attention and affection without violence, as well as offering space for children to feel valued and to have control over their lives. Additionally, Rafa's sense of helplessness, which emerges from feeling trapped by social and religious norms, also reflects the reality that many children feel bound by the values imposed by their families or society. The demand to respect parents, even when it leads to oppression or injustice in certain situations, often leaves no room for children to voice their opinions or defend themselves. This phenomenon occurs in many cultures, where respect for parents and social norms is deemed more important than individual freedom. In many cases, children who feel pressured by these values struggle to find their identity and feel powerless to claim their rights.

Thus, Rafa's helplessness reflects a social phenomenon that is commonly observed in everyday life, where authoritarian parenting, excessive demands, domestic violence, and pressure from social and religious norms can create feelings of helplessness in children. If this helplessness is allowed to persist, it can affect the emotional and psychological development of children and hinder their ability to develop healthy self-control. Therefore, it is essential for society to recognize the importance of parenting styles that support balanced individual development, where children are given space to grow with confidence and control over their lives.

### **c. Death: The Pressure Leading to the End of Life**

At three in the afternoon, on March 28, 2023, the atmosphere in Rafa's classroom suddenly filled with voices of disappointment. How could it be that none of the students in his class passed the national entrance exam for public universities through the SNBP route? It seemed impossible, incomprehensible. Everyone was still in denial. Rafa, burdened by expectations and past trauma, returned home with deep fear. His fear of his mother, who might be angry and strike him again, haunted every step he took. Once inside the house, his anxiety intensified, and he lost control of himself. The voices in his mind grew louder, and he felt as though his body was locked in fear. When he finally met his mother, Ayas, Rafa screamed with overwhelming emotion, experiencing deep physical and emotional pain due to past treatment. Rafa admitted that he had failed to enter the university, as his mother had wanted. Although his mother tried to calm him down, Rafa felt unable to release the pain. He said, "My body is broken, Mom. My soul is broken. I have no purpose in life except to meet your demands. I have tried so many times to come home, but God hasn't allowed me to. I wanted to come home. Why does no one understand what I'm feeling?" Before Rafa could finish expressing his thoughts, suddenly his body collapsed and tumbled down the stairs. After the fall, Rafa was rushed to the hospital and briefly showed signs of recovery, although he refused to undergo further examinations. Despite appearing cheerful on the outside, Rafa was actually exhausted and longed to escape from all the burdens of his life. In the hospital room, Rafa expressed his desire to sleep without the pressures of life anymore. Unfortunately, his condition worsened, and after a series of tests, it was determined that his vital organs were failing. Rafa was eventually confined to the ICU, where hope grew increasingly faint. His loved ones continued to pray, hoping for a miracle to save him. However, Rafa chose to surrender. A nurse approached and informed them that the time of death was 6:45 PM.

In the novel *Our Home* by Valentina Madihanto, Rafa's death is not merely the end of life, but rather a manifestation of the psychological pressure experienced by an eldest child facing heavy expectations, both from within themselves and from their family, particularly from their mother. From this perspective, Rafa's death can be seen as a reflection of helplessness, anxiety, and relentless pressure, which ultimately leads to the decision to end his life. As the eldest child, Rafa is burdened with high expectations from his mother to succeed, as clearly illustrated in her desire for him to gain admission to a public university through the SNBP route. However, when Rafa fails to meet this expectation, he feels that his entire identity is shattered. For Rafa, this failure is not just about not entering university, but about his inability to meet the expectations placed upon him. This failure reopens old wounds of fear, anxiety, and the feeling of never being good enough, which exacerbates his psychological condition.

Rafa's past trauma, especially the harsh treatment from his mother, shapes his view of himself and the world around him. His fear of his mother's potential anger and violence adds further stress to his mental state. His inability to express his feelings and anxiety, which are not understood by those closest to him, creates a deep sense of isolation. When Rafa screams, "My body is broken, Mom. My soul is broken," this sentence illustrates the severity of the pressure he is enduring. He feels trapped in a body and soul that cannot escape the external demands that continue to press on him. Rafa feels that his life has only one purpose to fulfill his mother's desires. This leads to a sense of losing himself and a growing feeling of despair. When he speaks of wanting to sleep without life's pressures, this indicates his desire to escape from the relentless demands that weigh on him. The feeling of being trapped in endless expectations, coupled with the inability to find space for himself, adds a mental burden that he can no longer bear. Rafa's decision to end his life is the climax of the accumulated pressure he has been facing all this time.

Rafa's death can be interpreted as a symbol of the suffering experienced by many individuals who are trapped by excessive expectations from their social environment, especially their family. As the eldest child, Rafa feels bound by the great responsibility of meeting his parents' expectations, yet at the same time, he feels incapable of achieving them. His death not only represents despair, but also offers a broader understanding of how family and social pressures can ruin a person's mental well-being, particularly for those who feel isolated and unappreciated. Rafa's death serves as a strong reminder of the importance of emotional understanding and support, as well as the need for space for individuals to find their own identity without being trapped by destructive demands.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The discrimination experienced by Rafa as the eldest child is evident in various aspects of life, including high academic demands, significant responsibilities, and unequal treatment by her mother. In contemporary society, this phenomenon is common, particularly for eldest children, who are often burdened with high expectations, both academically and in terms of family responsibilities. Based on available data, Rafa is constantly faced with unrealistic expectations, especially in academics, where her mother demands that Rafa maintain perfect grades and achieve a score of 100, leaving no room for failure. In the current social context, excessive expectations for children to be perfect, especially in education, can create harmful psychological pressure. When even the smallest failure is seen as a major threat, this can add significant mental strain, especially for adolescents who are in the process of discovering their identity and trying to understand the world around them. Discrimination in the form of family responsibility is also a very real issue in today's society. As the eldest child, Rafa is expected to take on adult roles, care for her younger siblings, and even work to support the family's finances. The imposition of responsibilities that should be borne by the parents creates an imbalance in family roles, where Rafa bears burdens that should not be placed on a teenager. This situation often contributes to hindered psychological development and a sense of helplessness. It can also lead to difficulties in building social relationships and developing personal skills, which should ideally be part of adolescence.

In addition to discrimination, Rafa also faces an increasing sense of helplessness that further worsens her situation. According to the learned helplessness theory proposed by Martin Seligman, helplessness arises when an individual feels they have no control over the situation they are facing. Rafa feels trapped by the continuous pressures of both high academic demands and significant family responsibilities. This helplessness is reflected in how Rafa surrenders to the constant demands to meet her mother's expectations. In today's social context, this phenomenon is also common among adolescents raised in authoritarian parenting styles. These adolescents feel there is no room for failure, and their efforts are never appreciated, which eventually leads to feelings of despair and helplessness. Rafa's sense of helplessness is further exacerbated by the unequal treatment she receives, both in terms of attention and physical abuse. As the eldest child, Rafa is burdened with very high expectations, while her younger siblings do not face the same pressures. This injustice creates a deepening sense of helplessness, which is compounded by the physical violence she endures. Physical abuse not only causes physical pain but also damages Rafa's psychological condition. According to Wiraadi et al. (2022), violence against children has significant negative effects, leading children to experience fear, insecurity, anxiety, resentment, decreased motivation to learn, loss of concentration, withdrawal, and weakening mental health. This can reduce their self-confidence and lead to depression, which may even result in the child's death.

The fear and anxiety caused by her mother's mistreatment became the initial triggers for Rafa's death. The helplessness Rafa experienced shows profound despair. In everyday life, many children experience similar feelings, where constant demands from family and social environments can make them feel trapped, exhausted, and hopeless. Rafa's decision to end her life was the culmination of the continuous pressures in her life. According to Alfi Faiz (2025), the urge to end one's life can emerge as a form

of profound despair or as an attempt to stop the emotional pain someone is enduring. Rafa felt that all the efforts she made were never enough to meet her mother's expectations, and she no longer saw a reason to keep living. Rafa's wish to rest without thinking about grades reflects the peak of the helplessness shaped by the discrimination in the form of high academic demands, social pressure, and the unfair treatment she endured throughout her life. In this context, Rafa's death becomes a symbol of the suffering experienced by many children and adolescents trapped in excessive demands from their families and social environments. This phenomenon also provides a broader picture of how social injustice, unrealistic expectations, and violence can damage an individual's mental well-being, especially children in similar situations. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how social pressures and injustice within family life can have negative effects on an individual's well-being. Authoritarian parenting styles that are overly demanding and the discrimination children face can lead to long-lasting negative impacts on their mental health. It is essential for society to pay more attention to and support children's mental health, providing space for them to grow in a healthy manner and avoiding adding burdens that they should not bear.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the discrimination experienced by first-born children like Rafa represents a form of injustice in parenting patterns and the family social system that still occurs in society today. This discrimination does not only manifest in the form of unequal treatment of children within a family but also in the form of disproportionate pressure, heavy responsibilities, and unrealistic academic expectations. First-born children are often treated as “miniature parents,” bearing the responsibility of caring for younger siblings, assisting the family's finances, and maintaining perfect academic performance, without being given room to make mistakes or fail. In Rafa's case, this pressure evolved into profound helplessness, as explained by Martin Seligman's learned helplessness theory. Rafa felt she had no control over her life, and all her efforts were deemed insufficient. The high expectations from her mother were never matched with adequate appreciation or emotional support, leaving Rafa feeling exhausted, unappreciated, and ultimately falling into deep despair. Rafa's helplessness was further exacerbated by the unjust treatment and physical violence she endured, leading to a loss of self-confidence and a sense that the only way out was through death. This phenomenon reflects the condition experienced by many children in authoritarian and empathetic-poor families. The pressure to always be perfect creates a gap between expectation and reality that is hard to bridge, triggering serious psychological disorders.

This study has important implications for parents, educators, and society at large, urging them to be more sensitive to the pressures faced by children, particularly first-borns. The findings underscore the need for a supportive and humane parenting style to prevent the negative effects of discriminatory treatment and excessive pressure. Every child has capacities and limits that must be respected, not forced to meet unrealistic standards. Therefore, family discrimination must be recognized and prevented early to avoid long-term psychological impacts such as those experienced by Rafa. A limitation of this study is the focus on a single individual, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings broadly. Future research should explore various family and cultural backgrounds since parenting styles are heavily influenced by the social and cultural values upheld. It is hoped that this research encourages parents to establish more empathetic communication with their children, allow room for failure without judgment, and treat each child fairly, without burdening them with responsibilities that are disproportionate to their age and abilities. Additionally, the government and educational institutions should provide accessible professional counseling services for children experiencing psychological pressures, ensuring they receive the appropriate and directed assistance. In this way, it is hoped that similar tragedies will not occur, and children can grow in healthy, safe, and loving environments.

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