



Coverage Begins at the Corpse: Episodic Framing and the Newsworthiness Threshold of Violence Against Women in the Pakistani English-Language Press

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Abstract

Since 2016, Pakistani law has recognized economic and psychological abuse as forms of violence. But media coverage has a lot to do with public recognition of abuse. The law’s more capacious definition may be idle where the news frame allows only visible injury. To learn what kinds of violence against women are considered newsworthy by the English-language newspaper of record in Pakistan, and how they are framed if they are. Method Quantitative content analysis of 88 articles published in Dawn between 23 July 2025 and 24 August 2026, selected from the newspaper’s “gender violence” and “violence against women” tag archives. Articles were coded for type of violence, episodic/thematic framing, primary source, attributional language, remedy frame, and inclusion of non-physical abuse in the report. No article (0.0%) was mainly about psychological abuse, economic abuse and coercive control. This type of conduct was reported in 22.7% of articles, always as a small detail when considering a physical injury. Framing was episodic for 76.1% of articles. Police documentation or court proceedings were the primary account for 61.4%. The survivor’s own voice was present for 3.4%. Thematic framing was almost entirely confined to opinion, policy and advocacy items (15 of 16) rather than news reports (6 of 72) ($\chi^2 = 47.97$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; $OR = 165.0$). Coverage of violence against women in Pakistan functions under a threshold of visibility which is set at the body. Non-physical abuse is not only under-reported; it is also structurally unreportable within the conventions of what currently exists as crime journalism, derived as it is from police documentation and therefore unable to accommodate conduct that produces no incident, no scene and no complaint. The newspaper has its own pattern-level analysis, but it is limited to commentary. Implications for reporting conventions, awareness campaigns and release of institutional data are discussed.

Keywords: Coercive control, Economic abuse, Framing theory, Episodic framing, Violence against women, Pakistan, News media, South Asia

Article Details:

Received on 26 Feb, 2026

Accepted on 29 March, 2026

Published on 30 March, 2026

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1. Introduction

Pakistan's legal framework accepts that domestic abuse is not limited to causing physical harm. The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016 defines violence to include economic and psychological abuse along with physical harm. Similar provincial legislation was adopted elsewhere including the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act 2021. If a woman is prevented from earning, or her income is confiscated, or she is confined, or she is continuously humiliated, she has been subjected to violence in law (Jatoi, 2016, Bibi, et al., 2025)

But the statute does not create the public's understanding. News makes up a good part of it. What counts as a 'story' in the press about violence against women actually determines what citizens, police officers, magistrates and families define as violence at all. If the news frame only allows for bruises women who don't see themselves in it don't claim the law's wider definition and officials who don't see it themselves under-enforce it.

This gap between legal and mediated definition is the problem to which this study is addressed. The paper does not attempt to estimate the magnitude of violence because nationally representative prevalence estimates already exist. It's not about what is news, but what crosses the news threshold, and how it is framed once it's there.

RQ1. Which forms of violence against women appear in Pakistani national newspaper coverage, and in what proportion? Do psychological, economic and coercive forms of control ever constitute the substance of a report, or do they appear only as incidental context within reports of physical harm?

RQ2. Is coverage framed episodically, as discrete incidents, or thematically, as a pattern with structural causes?

RQ3. Whose account defines the event, and how often is the survivor's own voice present?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Non-physical abuse as violence

This conceptual shift from incident to pattern is well established internationally. Stark's conceptualization of coercive control reframes abuse as a liberty crime a sustained strategy of domination through surveillance, isolation, micro-regulation and deprivation not a series of discrete assaults (Stark, 2007). Thus, the question of diagnosis is not: Has a woman been struck? but: Is her freedom in daily life being systematically reduced?

Economic abuse has followed a similar trajectory, from an unnamed background condition to a measurable construct that includes economic restriction, exploitation and sabotage (Adams et al., 2008). It is however one of the least clearly defined and least understood forms of abuse, and has been repeatedly identified as a persisting evidence gap.

2.2 The Pakistani evidence base

The only nationally representative data on intimate partner violence in Pakistan are from two rounds of the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, the only rounds in which the Domestic Violence module was included (NIPS & ICF, 2013, 2019). Analysis reports of these rounds found ever-experienced IPV to be 33.48% (95% CI: 30.76–36.32). The significant correlates retained in the final multivariable model were number of living children, knowledge of parental IPV, husband's alcohol use and marital control (Shaikh, 2024).

Two aspects of this evidence base are relevant here. First, marital control is typically modeled as a predictor of physical violence, rather than as a form of violence in its own right – replicating at the measurement level the hierarchy identified in this paper at the level of news framing. Second, methodological reviews have pointed out that much of the prevalence research in Pakistan relies on convenience samples, with the attendant risk of inflated

estimates, and that the normalization of domestic violence within patriarchal family structures depresses reporting (Ali et al., 2019).

The scale of demand that never makes the news is revealed in administrative and civil society data. From April 2024, Punjab's Virtual Women Police Station received 114,540 complaints, and 59,798 of these were related to DVAW (Dawn, 2024). In 2023, a parliamentary body separately recorded 10,201 cases of domestic violence against women in Punjab, while the conviction rate was reported to be two to five per cent by KP police (Dawn, 2024b). According to the Aurat Foundation's Annual Statistics 2020, there were more than 11,000 cases of violence against women. The highest number of cases was in the category of domestic abuse with 4,775 cases, followed by rape and gang rape (2,297) and murder (1,033) (Express Tribune, 2024). The Express Tribune's database of national figures shows that 63,367 gender-based crimes were reported during 2019–2021, including 3,987 killings and 10,517 registered rape cases (Express Tribune, 2022). In 2024, the Sustainable Social Development Organization reported that 90% of Pakistani women have experienced violence in their lifetime, compared to the global average of 30% (cited in Dawn, 2025).

Two disproportions ensue, both are directly relevant to this study. First, domestic abuse is the largest category in civil-society data while, as the present findings show, it accounts for a negligible share of coverage. Second, tens of thousands of complaints are accompanied by two-to-five percent conviction rates, suggesting that even those cases that make it into the formal record do not, for the most part, lead to the arrest-and-prosecution remedy that coverage implies is the normal outcome.

2.3 Media framing of gendered violence

The analytic vocabulary is found in Entman's (1993) account of framing – selection and salience; promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation and remedy. Central to this is Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic framing. Episodic framing treats an issue in terms of discrete instances, while thematic framing treats it in terms of broader conditions. The former is correlated with attribution of responsibility to individuals rather than institutions.

Episodic framing yields a signature package when applied to gendered violence: a single incident, told through police documentation, resolved by arrest. Meyers (1997) documented the parallel pattern in American coverage. Content analysis of domestic violence homicide reporting has since found coverage that framed such killings as isolated incidents rather than as a social problem, in ways that reinforced common misconceptions. In particular, Carlyle et al. (2008) established the link between episodic framing and individualized causal attribution for intimate partner violence coverage.

2.4 The South Asian comparative context

Here, content analyzes from neighboring countries are synthesized to see if the exclusion of non-physical abuse from news is specific to the country or structurally present in the region. It is a review of the secondary literature and not a primary coding.

India. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, "cruelty by husband or relatives" is the most common recorded crime against women, at 31.4% of all such crimes in 2022, but analyzes of Indian media narratives find reports of domestic abuse to be relatively rare and generally presented as isolated family disputes rather than structural problems, with dowry deaths and spousal abuse hardly registering even in coverage of crimes against women (Kumari, et al., 2025). Longitudinal topic-modelling of the English-language press before and after the 2012 Delhi gang rape showed a significant rise in episodic frames immediately after the trigger event, with thematic framing emerging only over a longer horizon – evidence that

thematic treatment is event-contingent rather than routine (Kaur, 2013). This paper presents a headline-level analysis of two national English dailies and shows a preponderance of sexual violation, sensationalism and constructions as grammatical subjects of survivors in 41.6% of headlines, with implications for attributed blame.

Bangladesh. The most recent comparable study analyzed 380 reported instances of abuse across nine leading newspapers between January and July 2025, finding that rape and murder together account for over 60% of coverage while dowry-related harm – a paradigmatic form of economic coercion in the regional context – remains under-emphasised (Palash et al., 2025). In a discourse analysis of 71 articles about sexual harassment in public transport, the dominant framing is systemic-legal (oriented toward legal recourse), while less frequent is discourse that frames harassment as symptomatic of broader gender inequality (Mowri & Bailey, 2023).

Afghanistan. No peer-reviewed content analyzes examining Afghan press coverage of violence against women during the period of study were identified. This absence is analytically significant: the long-term constraints on independent journalism and women's participation in media since 2021 have prevented the conditions for this coverage, and this scholarship, to be produced. Afghanistan remains a limiting case, not a coded comparator.

Beyond South Asia. A frame analysis of Ghanaian coverage of violence against women and girls found framing predominantly episodic, with acts presented as individual cases without reference to wider social context, and victim-blaming language widely used (Owusu-Addo, et al., 2018) indicating that the pattern is not confined to South Asia.

Synthesis Across settings with evidence, three findings converge: coverage is focused on lethal and sexual violence, framing is predominantly episodic and legally oriented, and economic and coercive forms of abuse are systematically underrepresented relative to their prevalence in administrative and survey data. The comparative literature indeed reports under-emphasis and not absence which is the benchmark against which the present findings should be interpreted.

2.5 The research gap

Existing Pakistani scholarship has established prevalence and correlates. It has not defined what the news public is working with. To the best of the author's knowledge, no available content analysis has ever tested, over a sustained period of national coverage, whether non-physical abuse ever functions as the substance of a report rather than as background to a body.

3. Method

3.1 Design

Quantitative content analysis with supplementary qualitative examination of deviant cases.

3.2 Source selection

Dawn, Pakistan's newspaper of record in English. The single outlet design is a deliberate choice as a conservative test: Dawn's editorial line is relatively progressive on gender, and it has a dedicated gender-violence section. The patterns of exclusion observed here would be expected to be more pronounced in outlets with less developed gender coverage. This supports rather than undermines inference from a null finding.

3.3 Phase 1 of the Corpus (reported here). All articles in Dawn's "gender violence" and "violence against women" tag archives until 25 August 2026, from 23 July 2025 to 24 August 2026. After removing duplicates and cross-listed, N = 88.

Phase 2 (ongoing). Archiving of the same tag archives from January 2017, retro-active from the period of implementation of Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016.

Inclusion: articles that have violence against a woman or girl as the main subject. International



items were kept and coded but flagged as part of the frame environment the Pakistani reader faces.

3.4 Unit of analysis

The article: Headline, standfirst and lead are coded – these elements carry framing for the bulk of readers and constitute the standard unit of analysis in headline-level framing research. Full-text verification is conducted on a randomly selected 20% subsample.

3.5 Codebook

Variable	Categories
Violence type	homicide; honour killing; sexual violence; physical assault; psychological abuse; economic abuse; coercive control; digital abuse; harassment; custodial death; policy/advocacy; aggregate statistics
Framing	episodic (discrete incident) / thematic (pattern, structural causation)
Primary source	police or FIR; court; family; survivor; perpetrator; NGO or expert; official; politician; other
Survivor voice	present / absent
Attributional language	minimising (trivial trigger, honour motive, “dispute”) / neutral / pattern-naming
Remedy frame	arrest and prosecution; legislation; services; prevention; institutional reform; none
Non-physical abuse: focus	principal subject / not
Non-physical abuse: mention	present as incidental detail / absent

3.6 Reliability

This is reported as limitation. Phase 1 was single coded. Before Phase 2, 20% of the subsample will be randomly selected to be double-coded independently and intercoder agreement will be reported as Cohen’s κ per variable with a threshold of $\kappa \geq .70$.

3.7 Analysis

Descriptive frequencies. Genre crosstabs framing. χ^2 independence test with Fisher exact test for expected cell count < five. Odds ratios as effect size. Analysis was done using Python (pandas, SciPy).

3.8 Éthique

The study consists of analysis of published material and does not involve any human participants and institutional confirmation of exemption will be obtained. Coverage does not re-identify victims named. Cases are referenced by coded identifier.

4. Results

4.1 Corpus

N = 88 articles, 23 July 2025 – 24 August 2026.

4.2 Headline findings

Table 1. Summary measures (N = 88)

Measure	n	%
Episodic framing	67	76.1
Police/FIR or court as primary source	54	61.4
Survivor’s own voice present	3	3.4
Perpetrator as primary source	2	2.3
Minimising causal attribution	16	18.2
Remedy framed as arrest/prosecution	60	68.2



Measure	n	%
Non-physical abuse as principal subject	0	0.0
Non-physical abuse as incidental detail only	20	22.7
4.3 RQ1 — What forms of violence reach the news		
Table 2: <i>Distribution of violence type (N = 88)</i>		
Category	n	%
Homicide (including honour killings)	33	37.5
Sexual violence	18	20.5
Policy, advocacy and opinion	15	17.0
Physical assault (non-fatal)	10	11.4
Harassment and digital abuse	9	10.2
Other	3	3.4
Psychological abuse	0	0.0
Economic abuse	0	0.0
Coercive control	0	0.0

Homicide and sexual violence combined account for 58% of coverage. No article on thirteen months of national coverage was focused on psychological abuse, economic abuse and coercive control.

Non-physical abuse was reported in 22.7% of articles, in all instances as incidental detail in an account of physical harm. Three of the 33 homicides showed a pattern of non-physical abuse prior to the death. Thus, the newspaper had evidence of a coercive pattern in these cases and ran the story, but only after the woman was dead.

The absence is total, not partial, as in India and Bangladesh.

4.4 RQ2 — Framing

76.1 % of articles employed episodic framing. A genre-by-genre look shows that this aggregate conceals an almost total separation.

Table 3. *Framing by genre*

	Episodic	Thematic	Total
News and court reports	66	6	72
Opinion, policy and advocacy	1	15	16
Total	67	21	88

$\chi^2 = 47.97$, $df = 1$, $p = 4.3 \times 10^{-12}$; Fisher's exact $p = 2.5 \times 10^{-11}$; OR = 165.0.

Dawn regularly publishes competent pattern-level analysis of gendered violence but it is almost entirely outside its news pages. The analysis is in the publication, it is quarantined from the reporting. This is the most important inferential finding of the study.

4.5 RQ3 — Source hierarchy

Table 4. *Primary source (N = 88)*

Source	n	%
Police / FIR	31	35.2
Court	23	26.1
Official	10	11.4
NGO / expert	7	8.0
Politician	2	2.3
Perpetrator	2	2.3
Survivor (all forms)	3	3.4
Other (family, witness, hospital, residents, data, video, religious leader)	10	11.4



The main account in 61.4% of articles was based on police records or court proceedings. The survivor’s own voice was heard 3.4% of the time. The perpetrator account appeared in 2.3% — similar to the survivor account, although both numbers are small enough that the comparison should not be over-interpreted at this N and is flagged for Phase 2.

4.6 Attributional language

In 18.2% of articles, causal attribution was minimized. The cause of a killing was located in a proximate and manifestly inadequate trigger in recurrent constructions: a monetary dispute, a family quarrel, a refused meal, a rejected marriage proposal, or in the honor motive. In each case the construction gives an explanation which is disproportionate to the result, and thus displaces the adequate explanation.

4.7 Remedy frames

Table 5. Remedy frame (N = 88)

Frame	n	%
Arrest and prosecution	60	68.2
None	10	11.4
Legislation	5	5.7
Institutional reform	4	4.5
Prevention	5	5.7
Services	1	1.1
Structural	1	1.1

Prevention, services and institutional reform: 11.3% in total. The regime of coverage makes one institutional response imaginable and the others largely unthinkable.

4.8 Comparative analysis

Table 6. Cross-national comparison of press coverage of violence against women

	Pakistan (present study)	India	Bangladesh
Corpus	88 articles, Dawn, 2025–26	Multiple studies, national English dailies	380 reports, nine newspapers, Jan–Jul 2025
Dominant violence type	Homicide + sexual = 58.0%	Sexual violation predominant	Rape + murder > 60%
Framing	Episodic 76.1%	Predominantly episodic; thematic event-contingent	Systemic-legal; inequality framing infrequent
Non-physical / economic abuse	Absent subject (0.0%)	as Dowry deaths and spousal abuse “barely mentioned” despite 31.4% of recorded crimes	Dowry-related harm under-emphasised
Survivor voice	3.4%	Survivors positioned as headline subjects in 41.6% of cases (blame-implicating)	Not separately reported

The Pakistani finding is qualitatively different as neighboring studies report under-emphasis while the present corpus reports complete absence. This is the strongest form that the finding could take. It is consistent with the regional pattern, rather than inconsistent, since the mechanism proposed in §5.1 predicts absence wherever crime reporting originates strictly in police documentation.



4.9 Recorded prevalence against coverage share

The main claim of the study is a disproportion and can be directly expressed by comparing the distribution of coded coverage with the independently recorded incidence.

Table 7. Recorded prevalence and share of coverage

Form of violence	Position in recorded data	Share of coverage (this study)
Domestic abuse (incl. non-physical)	Largest single category in Aurat Foundation <i>Annual Statistics 2020</i> (4,775 of ~11,000 cases); 59,798 of 114,540 complaints to Punjab's Virtual Women Police Station	0.0% as principal subject; 22.7% as incidental detail
Rape and gang rape	2,297 cases (Aurat Foundation, 2020); 10,517 registered 2019-21	20.5%
Murder	1,033 cases (Aurat Foundation, 2020); 3,987 killings 2019-21	37.5%

The finding is the inversion. In recorded data, the most common category is domestic abuse, while the least common is homicide. Coverage is most common for homicide and least common for domestic abuse (as a subject). Coverage share is approximately inversely related to recorded incidence.

Two caveats apply. The data sources are not directly commensurable – civil-society case documentation, police complaint logs and news coverage have different capture mechanisms and reference periods – and the comparison is therefore indicative rather than a formal test. But it still shows that the pattern found in Sec. 4.3 cannot be explained by intrinsic incidence.

4.11 Longitudinal institutional context, 2017-2025

The media corpus is 13 months long. To provide context, the study gathered data on recorded incidence from institutional and civil-society sources for the entire period of interest, 2017-2025. They are secondary aggregate numbers, not coded units. They are reported as context, not as findings.

Table 8. Recorded violence against women in Pakistan, 2017-2025 (institutional sources)

Period	Recorded figure	Source
2017-18	28% of women aged 15-49 report physical violence; 6% sexual violence; 34% of ever-married women report spousal physical, sexual or emotional violence	PDHS 2017-18, cited by UNFPA Pakistan
2020	~5,000 sexual violence cases recorded; 430 honour-killing cases reported	HRCP
2020	11,000+ VAW cases documented — domestic abuse largest category (4,775), rape/gang rape (2,297), murder (1,033); 200% rise in domestic violence during COVID-19	Aurat Foundation, <i>Annual Statistics 2020</i>
2021	5,279 rapes (incl. gang rape); 478 honour killings registered	HRCP, <i>State of Human Rights in 2021</i>
2019-2021	63,367 gender-based crimes; 3,987 women killed; 10,517 rape cases registered	Compiled police data, <i>Express Tribune</i>
2022	Conviction rate in rape cases 0.2%; ~4% of charge-sheeted cases proceeded to trial	SAMAA Investigation Unit
2023	10,365 VAW cases reported to Punjab police in first four months; 10,201 domestic violence cases in Punjab across the year	HRW; parliamentary committee
May-Aug	5,551 women kidnapped; 2,818 physically assaulted; 304	SSDO / CRDC



Period	Recorded figure	Source
2023	raped	
2024	≥405 women victims of honour crimes; provincial GBV analysis compiled via Right to Information requests	HRCP, <i>State of Human Rights in 2024</i> ; SSDO
Apr 2024–	114,540 complaints to Punjab Virtual Women Police Station, of which 59,798 domestic violence	Punjab Police
2025	Reported GBV cases rose 25% over an eleven-month period	HRCP

Study makes three observations. first, the sources are heterogeneous in method, geography and reference period, and do not constitute a consistent time series, from which no trend inference is made. Second, when disaggregated domestic abuse is the largest single category, consistent with the disproportion documented in §4.9 and stable over the period. Third, the conviction rates reported across these sources range from 0.2% to five per cent, compared to news coverage that framed the remedy as arrest and prosecution in 68.2% of articles.

4.10 Deviant cases

No Phase 1 article had non-physical abuse as the main subject, therefore within-corpus deviant case analysis was not possible. Preliminary searching outside the sampling frame found isolated examples where pattern language emerged most notably 2024 coverage of a complaint by a broadcast journalist where the FIR’s description of habitual abuse throughout the marriage made it into the report and the case attracted intervention by the provincial chief minister. The fact that such instances involve complainants with a public profile and institutional access is consistent with the argument in 5.1. Phase 2 will test this in a systematic way.

5. Discussion

5.1 The newsworthiness threshold

The organizing claim of this paper is that Pakistani news coverage of violence against women operates a threshold of visibility set at the body. Reportable conduct is conducting those results in an injury that can be photographed, a corpse that can be examined, or a document that can be quoted. None of these artifacts are produced by any conduct that restricts a woman’s movement, confiscates her earnings, monitors her communications or erodes her capacity to decide. None of these artifacts produce a story.

This is not generally editorial hostility. It is a structural effect of news making. Most crime reporting is based on the FIR and if a woman has not filed one, then there is no record for a reporter to work from. There is no date of incident, no scene, no forensic finding and no moment at which coercive control can be said to have occurred. It instantly fails every routine newsworthiness test. The upshot is a coverage regime that is not intentionally exclusionary, but is effectively so.

This reading is directly supported by the finding in 4.4. The absence would be an indication of editorial indifference and the publication would have no treatment at the thematic or pattern level. Not at all. It is crammed with commentary and almost without news. It’s not that the newspaper’s understanding changes between the two genres, but its sourcing routine.

5.2 The circularity problem

The result is a closed loop with practical effects. The only images of abuse in the public domain are of visible injury, and so there is no public language in which a woman experiencing sustained control can identify her experience as abuse. She does not write without that acknowledgment. Since she is not reporting, there is no

FIR. No FIR no coverage. No follow-up is done so the public vocabulary is not altered. The loop loops back on itself. And hardest on exactly those women whose situations are the most sustained and the least visible. It is not enough that it is legally recognized: Pakistani law has defined economic and psychological abuse as violence since 2016, but a definition that doesn't feature in the news cannot function as a category through which people interpret their own lives.

An example of the end of the loop are the three homicide reports revealing previous non-physical abuse (§4.3). In each the pattern was known and publishable but only after it had produced a body.

5.3 Framing and attributed responsibility

Framing can be episodic, which has a tendency to attribute causality to persons rather than to conditions (Iyengar, 1991; Carlyle et al., 2008). The episodic coverage of gendered violence thus produces a public narrative where each killing is the act of an aberrant man who is an aberration and no narrative at all of the conditions that made it the terminus of a longer process.

Minimize causal attribution of compounds. A report that a killing occurred "over" some trivial trigger provides a cause manifestly inadequate to the outcome, displacing the adequate explanation: a sustained regime of domination in which the trigger was merely the occasion. The trivial-trigger construction makes the killing both shocking and unexplained, and forecloses the question of what went before it.

5.4 Whose account defines the event

When the police report and court proceedings are the main source 61.4% of this corpus the event is defined in terms of criminal procedure: offense, section, suspect, remand. These categories are inherently episodic. Criminal law knows acts, it does not easily know patterns. A source regime based on the FIR therefore cannot produce pattern-level reporting even if individual journalists want it to.

It is worth stating plainly, the perpetrator's account appeared as often as the survivors. Offenders provide quotable copy at the time of arrest - admissions, justifications, claims of provocation - and are available for reporting in a way that living survivors of non-lethal control are not. This asymmetry is structural, not intentional and thus more nor less tractable to intervention.

5.5 A second-order effect: media-derived statistics

One methodological aspect of the Pakistani evidence base deserves particular attention. The organization's country head has made clear that its figures are a comparison of press coverage of incidents, not of incidents, and its periodic crime-tracking reports are based on print media coverage.

If national statistics on violence against women are compiled in part from newspaper reports, then the visibility threshold identified in this study propagates into the evidence base used by policymakers, donors and researchers. Abuses that never make the news never get into media-derived counts, and their absence from those counts then seems to confirm that they are rare, and that seeming rarity justifies further neglect in coverage and policy.

This is the circularity described at §5.2, one level higher. It implies that the practical stakes of news framing extend beyond public recognition to the construction of the official evidentiary record itself, and it is a caution to any researcher who treats media-derived crime statistics as independent of media framing.

5.6 Regional implications

The convergence described in 2.4 and 4.8 is clearly a regional, not a national, phenomenon. The mechanism proposed here a visibility threshold set at the body, reinforced by document-driven sourcing plausibly accounts for the Indian, Bangladeshi and Ghanaian findings alike, and is testable in any setting where crime reporting originates in police documentation.

5.7 Implications for practice

For newsrooms. The intervention is not more coverage but different sourcing. Reporting starting in the FIR will be episodic, no matter the editorial intent. At negligible cost in words, the addition of just one contextual line (the prevalence of the pattern, the existence of a helpline, the fact that control often precedes lethality) makes an episodic report partly thematic. Reporting guidelines on suicide provide a precedent for this kind of low-burden, high-yield editorial convention (Niederkrötenhaler & Sonneck, 2007). A concrete, adoptable recommendation is a similar set of conventions for gender-based violence.

For awareness drives. In Pakistan, campaign messages have largely echoed news framing, emphasizing physical injury. These findings suggest the greater need is recognition messaging – content naming specific controlling behaviors restriction of movement, confiscation of earnings, monitoring of phones, control of clothing and contact and naming them as abuse. A woman cannot get help for a condition that she has no name for.

For legal and service institutions. The volume of complaints to dedicated reporting mechanisms 59,798 domestic violence complaints to a single Punjab facility far outstrip anything reflected in coverage. Publishing disaggregated complaint data by abuse type (instead of just volume) would provide journalists with thematic material beyond a single FIR, addressing the source deficit described in 5.4.

This study defines the contents of coverage, not the audiences' takeaways from coverage. The natural next step is audience research examining whether episodic versus thematic framing affects recognition of coercive control.

5.8 What the findings do not reveal

A content analysis demonstrates an absence in coverage. It does not demonstrate that such absence results in non-recognition among readers. The circularity argument in 5.2 is theoretically motivated and consistent with the framing literature, but the causal link is not tested, only inferred. Nor does the study claim that Pakistani journalism is indifferent to violence against women. Thematic analysis in opinion and feature material suggests otherwise. The claim is more modest that it is the routines of news production, rather than the commitments of journalists, that decide which forms of violence become visible.

6. Limitations

Phase 1 was single coded, intercoder reliability is not yet established and all figures should be treated as provisional pending the double-coding protocol at §3.6. The 13-month Phase 1 window precludes analysis of change over time. Phase 2 addresses this. The English language design of the single outlet limits generalization to Urdu language and broadcast coverage which reach substantially larger audiences. This is a major constraint as the readership most affected by the phenomenon under study is unlikely to read Dawn. Coding at the headline and lead level captures framing as most readers encounter it but may under-detect nonphysical abuse mentioned deep in body text, which the 20% full-text subsample addresses. Sampling from curated tag archives may bring in an editorial bias in tagging decisions that is not representative of the full population of relevant articles. The direction of any resulting bias is unknown. A second English-language outlet (The Express Tribune) was sought to allow for cross-outlet comparison, but its topic archive does not expose a retrievable article listing. The

single-outlet design is thus a constraint of source architecture as well as of scope. The comparison in §4.9 is with data sources with different capture mechanisms and reference periods and is indicative rather than a formal test of proportionality.

7. Conclusion

Coverage begins with the corpse. The forms of violence most likely to be experienced by most women in Pakistan sustained restriction, economic deprivation, psychological domination – are, on the evidence assembled here, not just under-reported but structurally unreportable within prevailing conventions of crime journalism. Such harms have not been recognized in mediation, even where they have been recognized in law. Until then, the law's broader definition will remain a definition few of those it protects have ever encountered.

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