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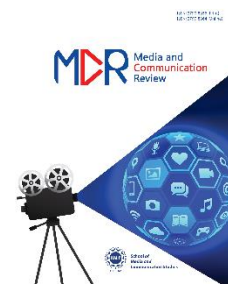
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News Media Representations of Domestic Violence Against Women in Pakistan

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Abstract

Incidents of domestic violence against women often appear in the media content particularly in newspapers. News reporting patterns are based on gendered landscapes through the conventional images of gender identities leading towards bias and inequality against women. In this regard, this research examined the news media reporting of domestic violence in Pakistan. The researchers conducted a discourse analysis of 3 prominent Urdu newspapers and gathered 87 reports published within the period of six months. Results indicated a direct infringement of ethical guidelines that are proposed by major journalist organizations. These violations include disclosing the victim's identity, proposing the speculations, unsuitable news headlines, lacking helpline details, and attribution mainly with physical violence. Therefore, in reporting domestic violence against women, Pakistani newspapers failed to follow the ethical guidelines. The researchers concluded that unethical practices could develop inappropriate and stereotypical narratives about women in Pakistani society. It is therefore essential for the media to ethically report the incidents in order to ensure community understanding of the violence against women and its severity.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, News Media, Violence Against Women, Ethical Reporting, Journalism

Introduction

Mass media have widely emerged as a prominent social institution, serving many functions that not only help to organize the society but also build a path to awareness. Today, media platforms have gained even more importance as they perform the functions that are not being performed by traditional social institutions of family, school, and church (Silverblatt, 2004). In this regard, McQuail considers media as a social institution with robust impacts on societal thinking and behavioral patterns. As far as the

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role and impact of mass media as a social institution is conered, it is still unclear. The major concerns includethe media's conduct towards marginalized groups, particularly women that is is a highly debatable phenomenon (McQuail, 1979). . This concern was accelerated during the second-wave feminism in 1960s in the United States and disseminated across the globe (Krijnen, 2017). To further validate the concerns of feminist scholars, Volčić argued that the feminist critical approach considers the world as historically and socially constructed through the power relations that position individuals differently based on their categories. These power relations can also be seen in gender, resulting in the oppression and marginalization of women (Volčić, 2008).

On the other hand, feminist scholars such as Holliday and their colleagues argued that the gender system is socially constructed and naturalized but it is not natural. Consequently, women's progressive representations in the media have provoked a ferocious debate as they are mainly now disguised versions of traditional sexism (Holliday et al., 2015). As Wood noted, one of mass media's main functions today is affecting how we view women and men. It is represented in a way that one group seems to be powerful, and the other seems to be submissive. Mass media content insinuates its messages in our consciousness, leading to the perpetuation of sensational, partial, marginalized, unrealistic, and stereotypical images of women. Firstly, the media content underrepresents women and then both sexes are portrayed in stereotypical manners. In addition to this the portrayals of women are based on the ideas that emphasize conventional gender roles and violence against women (Wood, Julia, 1994).

It is observed that news reporting patterns are often based on gendered landscapes depending upon the conventional images of gender identities that in turn leads towards biases and inequalities against women (Easteal et al., 2015). As noted by Mendes, media representations of violence against women provide a robust site to practice gender inequality. Feminist media theorists argue that portrayals of violence against women potentially support patriarchal values and purgation of this crime as an isolated concern rather than a social issue caused by male dominance (Mendes, 2012). Notably, domestic violence is a prevailing social concern in developed and developing regions (Walsh et al., 2015). For example, from 2004 to 2016, 4,734 women faced sexual violence, and more than 15,000 were confronted with honor killings in Pakistan.

Furthermore, there were 1800 domestic violence cases against women, and over 5,500 women abduction cases were also registered during the same period (Welle, [2019](#)). A recent survey indicated that 40% of women in Pakistan aged between 15-49% face domestic violence and one-third of that experienced it in the last twelve months. In 2018, 70% of women faced physical or sexual violence by their intimate partners or close relatives, and 30 women in Pakistan got murdered in the name of honor killing. More than 10,000 Pakistani women get murdered due to domestic violence every year and, thousands of women commit suicide due to poverty, denial of their rights, sexual and physical violence (Shairani, [2018](#)). (Impe, [2019](#)) examines the news media portrayals of domestic violence against women to affirm its role in the society. As argued, news media can legitimize some views and marginalize the others. Reporters, journalists, and editors can play an important role in highlighting and alleviating the domestic violence as a critical social concern. Coverage patterns and style can further affect the audiences' perceptions regarding domestic violence. Particularly when domestic violence is represented inappropriately, it can undermine the efforts to eliminate the inequality, further leading to increase the violence against women (Khan, [2020](#)).

Keeping in view the scholarly works and criticisms raised by scholars (Easteal et al., [2015](#); Walsh et al., [2015](#); Wood, [1994](#)), this study aims to examine Pakistani news media reporting of domestic violence against women. Notably, this study fills the gap in the existing literature as no study has addressed the media reporting of domestic violence in the Pakistani context. Thus, this study particularly focuses on critically analyzing the extent to which the relevant media reporting obligates the designated ethical guidelines. It further ensures balanced, objective and impartial reporting to ensure reformative awareness regarding the prevailing domestic violence in Pakistan. Hence, under the argumentation mentioned above, it is proposed that:

H1: Print media in Pakistan lack ethical practices to represent domestic violence in news reports

Review of Existing Literature

Media Coverage of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women is serious social concern. Social institutions such as news media play a crucial role in representing

information about the relevant incidents and shaping the audience opinion. While there is an increased emphasis on news media to spread awareness regarding domestic violence against women, existing literature also witnesses misrepresentations of such incidents in the news reports (Sutherland et al., [2019](#)). In this context, Bullock cited an example of news media framing and misrepresentation of domestic violence among Utah newspapers. As noted, news media use several techniques to promote and embed social constructions of male domination. One of these techniques is the misrepresentation of domestic violence in news reports by acknowledging the underlying male supremacy and gender stereotypes. For this purpose, news media utilize event-based reporting and framing of violence against women. Most news reports represent violence as a social norm instead of considering it as a women's rights infringement or a crucial social concern (Bullock, [2007](#)). Owusu-Addo and their colleagues further divided news media representations of domestic violence into two framing categories: Thematic Framing and Episodic Framing. Episodic framing is a predominant form of new media reporting where concerns are individualistic and are shown as particular instances. Under the relevant technique, news reports do not represent domestic violence as a social concern, leading to victim-blaming. Thematic framing, on the other hand, represents the issue in a broader social context, i.e., using prevalence statistics and incidents and social narratives about the causes of the violence against women, thus, leading to blame of other factors rather than the perpetrator themselves (Owusu-Addo et al., [2018](#)).

As noted by Fairbairn and Dawson, stereotypical or biased coverage of domestic violence and even another type of crime may distort people's perceptions about an issue. Most news reports trivialize and sensationalize such incidents leading to stereotypical understandings of these crimes that generate sexualized and innuendo drama for the audience through which they can tickle the audience's attention. Domestic violence against women is conventionally perceived as a private matter between two people. Women are private property to their husbands, women provoke men, and public intervention is not ethical. Such beliefs hinder the efforts to counteract the increased violence against women (Fairbairn & Dawson, [2013](#)).

According to Cullen and their colleagues, news media representations of domestic violence help determine how people perceive it as a major social concern, and relevant organizations devise strategies to counteract it.

A popular notion is news media provide the public with inadequate information, simplistic facts, and distorted images of violence against women. However, it is also notable that despite research witnessing problematic representations of domestic violence against women, determining the factors affecting these journalistic practices can also help provide the practical implications to reduce the violence against women (Cullen et al., [2019](#)). Thus, journalists are also a part of the society where the patriarchal norms and male dominance are widely practiced leading affects how they cover the reports, represent them, and reshape public opinion about domestic violence against women (Morgan & Simons, [2018](#)).

Laws Against Domestic Violence in Pakistan

The Pakistan Penal Code or PPC (1860) works to charge criminal offenses in the country. Earlier, PPC did not have relatable laws to protect women against domestic violence; however, several pro-women laws were added to the PPPC penal code for women's rights protection (UN Women, [2012](#)). Under the PCC penal code (1860), Chairman Senate Mrs. Nilofar Bakhtiar passed a bill under Act, 2012 assuming the domestic violence against women and children as a criminal offense, punishable by law, and imposition of a heavy fine The bill also stipulated the ongoing cases regarding domestic violence would also be dealt under the Act 2012. Besides, the relevant bill would also protect the rights of employees, adopted, and domestic associates.

However, later the Ministry of Human Rights Pakistan revised the existing penal code and represented The Bill for Domestic Violence Act 2020 (Prevention and Protection) in the National Assembly under the supervision of Federal Human Rights Minister Dr. Shireen Mazari. The bill aims to protect women, children elderly, and every vulnerable entity against domestic violence (Ministry of Human Rights, [2021](#)). Under the bill, the perpetrator will face either three months' imprisonment or a fine ranging from Rs20,000 to Rs100,000 or both. However, culture and societal honor are some of the invisible barriers to implementing domestic violence bills in the country. It is also notable that; Pakistani legislation falls short of implementing laws to protect women. Even after the Domestic Violence Act of 2012, the cases of domestic violence against women have not decreased. Several organizations such as United Nations Women, Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO), UNICEF, and

many others have raised their voices to strictly implement laws to protect children and women in Pakistan (Singh & Neema, [2021](#)).

Ethical Guidelines for Reporting Domestic Violence

Many international and national media organizations introduced ethical guidelines to feature reports focusing on domestic violence (International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], [2016](#); Impe, [2019](#); United Nations, [2019](#); World Health Organization, [2016](#)). These guidelines restrict media from working under certain obligations and tend to scrutinize media proceedings about promoting/eliminating gender-based violence. Researcher in the current analysis selected eight standard guidelines provided by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), UNESCO, Aurat Foundation Pakistan, and the International Women's Forum World Health Organization (WHO). According to UNESCO, each of the concerned guidelines highlights an overarching goal to guide the journalists to enhance the understanding of exploitation against women (Impe, [2019](#)). Therefore, these guidelines may include:

1. Avoid mentioning the name of the survivor/victim.
2. Avoid sharing photos/ videos of the survivor/victim
3. Do not add speculative reasons regarding an incident
4. Name the incident as “domestic violence” instead of horror/tragedy
5. Place the responsibility solely on the killer
6. Avoid sharing the remarks that may affirm that domestic violence is merely a physical crime.
7. Make the perpetrator visible in your report
8. Include details about the helplines

Countries have developed the above-stated guidelines that ensure the ethical reporting and safety of the victims. These guidelines encourage sensitive and responsible reporting. They are translated almost everywhere and are easily accessible (Parvez & Roshan, [2010](#)). Therefore, domestic violence is one of the most crucial social issues worldwide. The journalistic reporting style further determines the incident's different narratives (Sutherland et al., [2016](#)).

Research Method

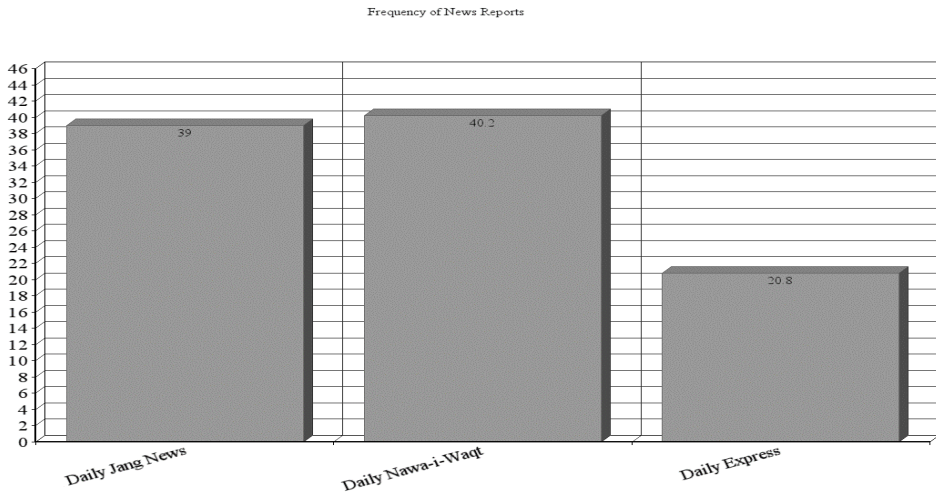
This research is based on the data collected from $n = 3$ Pakistani newspapers: Daily Jang, Daily Nawa-i-Waqt, and Daily Express (National Dailies). These newspapers are selected due to their wide readership, different content and editorial styles, and dissimilar readership. The selection of the relevant newspapers also helped examine the discrepancies based on the number of news stories published in them. Although the selected newspapers are not necessarily the representatives of regional Pakistani newspapers, they will help to serve as case studies that can be employed in other newspapers for future researchers. The Daily Jang newspaper is a prominent national daily newspaper founded in 1939 and has one of the largest circulation statistics of 850,000 copies per week. The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt is the second most prominent Urdu national daily newspaper founded in 1940, having circulation statistics of 400,000 copies each week. Finally, the third selected newspaper Daily Express is the third most regulated newspaper founded in 1998, currently having 272,259 copies/ week. The researcher obtained both e-copies and hard copies of the relevant newspapers and analyzed the relevant news reports published from November 18th, 2018, to May 18th, 2019. Using these three newspapers during the selected dates helped conduct the quantitative content analysis of the newspapers' language (discourse analysis) regarding domestic violence against women. The researcher checked and gathered all the relevant reports from the first, back, and pages entitled "metropolitan" to assess the extent to which domestic violence cases gained equal attention from developed and underdeveloped areas. However, as compared to developed cities, remote areas were more prominent.

Moreover, every news report was carefully read and annotated. It is also notable that the researcher categorized the news reports thematically into three categories: sexual violence, physical violence, and emotional violence, to affirm the most relevant type of domestic violence against women. Furthermore, the researcher gathered the data by converting the eight ethical guidelines into questions: Does a news report reveal the victim's identity? Does the news report involve any speculative reason? Does the news report contain the relevant headline? Does the news report imply the perpetrator is a solely responsible incident? Does the news report narrate the incident as "physical violence"? Does the news report contain any photos of the victim? Does the news report reveal the perpetrator's

identity? And finally, Does the news report involves helpline details? Thus, the data coding, manipulation, and results addressed all the questions that are represented in the next section.

Data Analysis & Findings

Figure 1
Frequency of News Reports



As mentioned earlier, data analysis first determined the extent to which coverage is given to news reports about domestic violence in all three selected newspapers (See Figure 1). The frequency calculation of the news reports revealed that Daily Nawa-i-Waqt was leading the coverage by publishing $n = 35$ or 40.2% of news stories. Daily Jang News published $n=34$ or 20.7% of news reports, and Daily Express published $n = 18$ or 20.7% of news reports covering domestic violence. The accumulative frequency of published news stories was $n= 87$ within the selected time of six months.

Revealing the Victim's Identity

Maintaining the victim's identity and personal information is an ethical duty of the news reporters and journalists. News media are abode by the ethics to not disclose any detail that can cause harm to the survivor or their family (IFJ, [2016](#)). Although reporting on one's private life is ethical for public interest and social welfare, revealing the identity endangers their life and health, news media should refrain from doing so.

Similarly, disclosing age, city, marital status, and parenting status are unethical. The current research found most of the reports reveal the victims' identity ($n = 84$ or 96.6%), including name, age, locality, and relation with the perpetrator. It is also notable that sometimes victims want to keep their names and identities private as it can help stalkers or perpetrators approach them. It can also hinder them from living in everyday life. The privacy of domestic violence victims, sexual assaults, and stalking are essential as it is a crucial component of the victim's safety.

Perpetrator's Identity

Several studies witness how naming the perpetrator helps to shape the audience's perceptions. For instance, Alat examined how Turkish news media represent domestic violence cases. Findings revealed that most news reports did not appropriately reveal the perpetrator's identity (Alat, [2006](#)). Media reporting often uses dehumanizing names for the perpetrators, i.e., beast, monster, friend. These names can show sympathies for the victim, but they are no substitute for revealing the perpetrator's identity (Impe, [2019](#)). Therefore, results revealed that almost all the news reports ($n=67$ or 65.6%) disclosed the identities of abusers by mentioning their names, professions, and locality. According to the United Nations, the perpetrator's visibility in the report is necessary as it is a criminal offense, and the perpetrator should be explicitly identified (United Nations, [2019](#)).

Graphical Representations/Photos

Ethical concerns become intense, especially about avoiding sensationalism and disclosing the victim's identity through graphical representations. Publishing the photos depicting violence and victim condition need extreme care and valid justification. In this regard, the results revealed that most news reports did not publish victims' photos, which is a positive news reporting practice. For IFJ, publishing graphical representations further normalize the perceptions about hyper-masculinity of men and victimization of women as "ideal criminal and the ideal victim" (IFJ, [2016](#)).

Relevant Headline

The news media reporting patterns determine how the audience perceives an incident. In this regard, the researchers found that $n=77$ or 88.5% of news reports did not have any relevant headline, which failed to identify the type of report. United Nations also emphasized using

appropriate news headlines to identify the incident appropriately. As argued, the media should name the report as “violence against women” as domestic violence is not due to the “volatile relationship” (United Nations, [2019](#)).

Helpline Details

According to IFG, new reports containing useful information concerning effective support programs and organizations can help seek immediate help. It can also help the survivors avail protection from any potential harm in the future (IFJ, [2016](#)). Consequently, the United Nations recommends mentioning the helpline details in the news report to guide the victims to seek help (United Nations, [2019](#)). As stated “include helpline details at the end of the broadcasts or newspaper reports. Also, mention all the jurisdiction information where needed”.

However, findings revealed that none of the observed news reports ($n = 87$ or 100%) mentioned any relevant helpline details. Yet, World Health Organization also raises a concern that most women refrain from reporting domestic violence. Besides the fear of divorce and bringing dishonor to their family, they also do not know trustworthy organizations that can support them (World Health Organization, [2016](#)).

Perpetrator’s Responsibility

According to IFJ, a news report should not imply the victim is partially or wholly responsible for the violence she experienced. Nor her behavior should be regarded as provoking her exploitation (IFJ, [2016](#)). Besides, avoid using the language that excuses the perpetrator and women as the provocative agent. Therefore, $n = 79$ or 85.5% of news reports have mentioned the perpetrator as the responsible mechanism for the incident. As noted by Sutherland and their colleagues, language and style of reporting affect audience perceptions about the incident. Domestic violence should be attributed to the perpetrator so that people may understand the dynamics of the incident to counteract it (Sutherland et al., [2016](#)).

Attribution with “Physical” Violence

Domestic violence is widely divided into physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual exploitation, and economic abuse. It is essential to differentiate them to break this cycle. Also, news media reporting should highlight the incident by mentioning the type of abuse involved (Sutherland

et al., [2016](#)). For this reason, the researchers also analyzed the attribution of the selected news reports and found that most of the reports ($n=78$ or 89.7%) identified the incidents only as "physical violence". Whereas United Nations also suggested identifying the type of violence as sometimes media only focus on a single aspect and one-sided story. Reporters also refrain from highlighting the type of violence, thus creating misperceptions about the incident (UN Women, [2012](#)).

Speculative Reasons

Previous studies affirmed that unethical media reporting resulted in negative stereotypes against women. It happened when the news reports described an incident as an outcome of some "provocative" factor or circumstances (Sutherland et al., [2016](#)). According to European Council, narratives of domestic violence can be problematic. News media should not describe "reasons" for domestic violence, i.e., extramarital affairs, financial causes, murder, etc. Losing jobs, financial problems and extramarital affairs are not the reason for violence, but the men are (Braber, [2014](#)). Therefore, in the present study that $n=84$ or 96.6% of news reports contained speculative reasons for domestic exploitation. Once again, violence against women is not due to drugs, financial problems, stress, infidelity or others. "Men cause it. That is the story we need to tell" (European Council, [2014](#)).

Hypothesis Testing: Chi-Square Analysis

To assess the hypothesized statement, the researchers used the χ^2 test of independence with $\alpha = .05$ as a criterion for significance. According to Ugoni and Walker, the Chi-Square test (χ^2) is a useful technique that helps examine the relationships theoretically supported by the research hypothesis. Chi-Square is to measure the exact divergence of the expected and observed frequencies. Hence, this test is of greater significance in experimental studies. Thus, the Chi-Square analysis (χ^2) test in current research revealed that print media in Pakistan lack ethical guidelines for reporting domestic violence as $\chi^2 (8, n = 87) = 16.836, p = .032$, which affirmed the preliminary research hypothesis. Table 1 summarizes the results of the Chi-square assessment:

Table 1*Chi-square distribution among the sampled newspapers*

	Value	df	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	16.838a	8	.032
Likelihood Ratio	17.262	8	.027
Linear-by-Linear Association	.029	1	.864
N of Valid Cases	87		

Discussion

Due to an increased number of violence against women, Pakistan is ranked as the sixth most dangerous country for women. Every year around 1,100 women get killed in the name of honor. Likewise, during the last few years, dozens of women confronted honor killings but were declared suicide cases because they were victimized by their own families and partners (Talpur, [2019](#)). Women face harassment, discrimination, and psychological and physical harm. Although Pakistan is a democratic state and women are free to make their life decisions, specific incidents still witness the oppression of women in society (Zia, [2019](#)). Domestic violence is a huge social and moral burden today. Women from all over the world face it regardless of ethnic, cultural, social and economic class distinctions. Domestic violence against women is not only geographically common, but also it is widely accepted due to certain gender stereotypes and sociocultural norms (Kaur & Garg, [2008](#)).

According to Tahir, domestic violence is a highly prevalent endemic social issue in Pakistan. The situation worsens when most victims do not have access to law enforcement authorities. Also, Law Enforcement Authorities do not consider domestic violence a criminal offense and refuse to register any relevant complaints (Tahir, [2018](#)). Due to the sensitivity of the women's rights violations and other sociocultural circumstances, domestic exploitation cases sometimes remain unreported in Pakistan. That is why the majority of women are confronted with domestic violence daily. It is a complex behavioral pattern that needs attention and immediate action against it, making it important to highlight the domestic violence on the public platforms like news media (Khan, [2009](#)). Additionally, unethical representations, careless reporting styles, and sensationalized

reporting can further increase the prevailing phenomenon. For these purposes, ethical practices should be the central concern for the newsrooms for supporting social welfare (Sutherland et al., [2016](#)).

Thus, we also found a significant relationship between newspaper reporting and violations of ethical reporting guidelines in the current article. The significance value of $p = .032$ validated our basic research hypothesis "Print media in Pakistan lack ethical practices to represent domestic violence in news reports ."These results are consistent with the study conducted by Lloyd and Shamon, as they also witnessed the same outcomes when they analyzed the news media reporting of domestic violence in Britain. The discourse analysis of newspapers published in 2001-2002 and later in 2011-2012 revealed a higher frequency of violations. Yet, as compared to the Guardian, Sun contained a comparatively higher number of infringements (Lloyd & Ramon, [2017](#)).

It is notable that news reports concerning domestic violence typically contain narratives, i.e., a man murdered his partner, financial loss led the husband to kill his wife, a drug-addicted man shot his partner, a boy killed his girlfriend and others. These media narratives of violence against women further maintain the stereotypical perceptions about gender roles and violence against women (Easteal et al., [2015](#)). As noted by Phung, news media represent the social narratives in a manner that people perceive according to the particular frames (Phung, [2011](#)). Nonetheless, the unethical portrayal of domestic violence brings negative consequences to mediatization as it constitutes the world regulated by media "logic" These unethical reporting styles deeply affect how society and the perpetrators perceive violence against women (Hjarvard, [2008](#)).

Furthermore, the recurrent theme of mutual responsibility is also debatable. Using the words like "family dispute" or "family violence" further intensifies the social concern as it is seen as a method of reinforcing dominant sociocultural perceptions about gender (Ali et al., [2020](#)). Moreover, disclosing the victim's identity, i.e., name, location, age, and details about their family members, is a great challenge which stipulates that disclosure of any relevant detail is highly unethical as revealing the identity can cause high risks to both the victims and their family (Alat, [2006](#)). As a result, UNESCO also emphasized hiding the victim's identity and refraining from publishing the shocking scenes, i.e., corpses, blood, fractures, wounds and others (Impe, [2019](#)). According to

Bucqueroux and Seymour, although incident-related videos on television can emotionally impact, photos published in newspapers are comparatively more detrimental to the victim, their family and friends. News reporting depending on the visual clichés also undermine the purpose of reporting the incident. For instance, a corpse in a coffin, an injured woman in an ambulance and others might not affect the readers, but they can be painful for the victim (Bucqueroux & Seymour, [2009](#)).

Moreover, making the perpetrators visible in the news report is highly recommended by Bucqueroux and Seymour as perpetrators are the main actors of the incident. While people search for details about the incident, the perpetrators' visibility is also a great concern (Bucqueroux & Seymour, [2009](#)). Sometimes, when the focus is more on the victim and perpetrators are exposed less, people sympathize with the perpetrator (Bucqueroux & Seymour, [2009](#)). For instance, Braber, in her study, found that instead of revealing the perpetrators' identities, the selected news reports highlighted their past experiences. The news reports were concerned about telling why the men were abusive towards their wives, thereby not leaving any need to search for the reason behind violent behavior (Braber, [2014](#)).

Furthermore, mentioning a relevant headline is another major ethical consideration for news media reporting. World Health Organization also suggests identifying the violence with the relevant definition described by the United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993). UNESCO also emphasized using relevant details to inform the public about the actual incident by describing the title of a news report as the window of the whole story. Notably, people get attracted to the title more than the narration about the incident. For this reason, journalists should consider the incident's relevance (UN Women, [2012](#)). However, news media often ignore mentioning the relevant headline concerning domestic violence. Therefore, it is recommended that the news reporting should alarm the audience about the type of incident so that people may appropriately understand its intensity and seriousness (IFJ, [2016](#)). As stated: "Name the relevant news report as "violence against women (e.g., domestic violence is not a "volatile relationship")." Similarly, do not use the word "sex" when you mean sexual assault. Honour killings should appear in quotes or with "so-called."

Finally, mentioning the helpline details is another vital ethical guideline proposed by IFJ, NUJ, UNESCO and other concerned organizations. According to World Health Organization, journalists should mention the helpline details at the end of the news article so that the survivors, witnesses, and their family members seek help from local support organizations (World Health Organization, [2016](#)). As noted by Easteal and Holland, media guidelines propose news writing practices so that the victims consult local or national domestic advocacy communities. In this regard, both the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) support spreading the information that can help to counteract domestic exploitation (Sutherland et al., [2016](#)).

Conclusion

This study comprised a snapshot of the widely practiced patterns depicting domestic violence against women in Pakistan. The published news reports witnessed that several articles are reporting domestic violence during the designated timeframe. Here we can assume that newspapers recognize the magnitude of the problem by focusing on them. Daily Jang and the Daily Nawa-i-Waqt have been the two most preferred Urdu newspapers in Pakistan since the 1940s. The Daily Express was launched in 1998 and is also among the most circulated and reputable newspapers. However, following the research hypothesis, we can claim that selected newspapers in Pakistan are violating the ethical guidelines while reporting domestic violence. In this regard, Fanslow cited four important considerations to improve the news media reporting of violence against women: (i), Focus on the bleak consequences of the domestic violence, (ii) stop attributing the incident to any background details which may excuse the perpetrator, (iii) cease labeling domestic violence as a family quarrel, and (iv) highlight the efforts and helplines that can promote nonviolence and cover the needs of the survivors by keeping their identity confidential (Fanslow, [2005](#)). Thus, the media is a powerful social institution that plays crucial role in dealing with the social and human rights issues like domestic violence. Media coverage can guarantee change as they deeply influence the thinking and perception of people. Implementation of ethical guidelines rely upon realization of the social and moral significance of ethical reporting for society.

Practical Considerations

Print media have been the oldest and most authentic source of information for a very long time in Pakistan. During sociopolitical tension, print media faced challenges informing the public (Mezzera & Sial, [2010](#)). The fact is, news media in Pakistan are playing their role in social well-being and development. They are efficiently spreading the information, keeping people updated, strengthening the democratic system, and serving the common person. These idiosyncratic features of news media, particularly the press, are related to propositions given by Social Responsibility Theory which is dominantly implemented in the Western media proceedings (Ittefaq et al., [2021](#)). However, the press's role in reporting domestic violence deviates from its prescribed liabilities. Ahmed argued that the news media in Pakistan violate the primary ethical guidelines while reporting domestic violence against women. As domestic violence against women is a rapidly growing social issue, the debate is about respecting the severity of the issue by news media reporting (Ahmed, [2014](#)).

The growing domestic violence against women exhibits that its dynamics have become more complicated, and unethical media reporting can be a basic mechanism to normalize it (Fernández-Villanueva et al., [2009](#)). However, news media can play a significant role by appropriately highlighting the relevant issue. Particularly the newspapers frequently publish stories addressing domestic violence against women. Ethical reporting style and collaboration with Human Rights organizations can nullify the growing cases of violence against women. Also, the press in Pakistan can highlight the cases which stay unreported due to several sociocultural obligations (Parvez & Roshan, [2010](#)). In such a situation, reporting on sensitive issues like domestic violence against women, obligating the media ethics, should be the priority for the reporters and the journalists. Especially the victim's privacy, confidentiality, and non-judgemental language should be the core concerns (Ahmed, [2014](#)).

Limitations & Recommendations

The scope of this study is limited as only eight ethical guidelines are selected to access the media reporting. Similarly, despite the researcher categorizing domestic violence into three categories, only the physical form of domestic violence is reported in news reports that further narrow the scope of the current study. Moreover, domestic violence is an ongoing social

concern worldwide, but it is evaluated only in the Pakistani scenario, further narrowing down the scope of this study. However, every possible step is taken to scrutinize the available data and carefully conclude accordingly. The researcher also recommends more investigations on news media portrayals of domestic violence, especially other major forms (including sexual and emotional) of violence against women, which are highly prevalent in Pakistan. Particularly, acid attacks need a strong consideration from future researchers to further highlight the relevant issue on a broader level.

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